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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 also assess the lessons for Europe, which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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Content

Editorial: Measuring Homelessness in Europe

Koen Hermans on behalf of the COST Action

This special issue of the *European Journal of Homelessness* is produced by the members of the COST Action 15218. COST provides networking opportunities for researchers and innovators in order to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges. COST implements its mission by funding bottom-up, excellence-driven, open and inclusive networks in all areas of science and technology. Researchers from 33 countries participated in the activities of this COST Action on *Measuring Homelessness in Europe* between 2016 and 2020. The purpose of this COST Action was: (1) to bring together the expertise and knowledge with regard to measuring homelessness; (2) to map current measurement methods; (3) to facilitate a common understanding of existing measurement approaches and to assess their transferability to other welfare systems and countries; (4) to identify and tackle specific measurement challenges (such as hidden homelessness, homelessness pathways and the diffusion between homelessness and migration), and (5) to contribute to a coherent European approach on measuring homelessness given differences in welfare systems and national data collection systems.

Measuring Homelessness in Europe: State of the Art[1]

Building on the work of the European Observatory on Homelessness (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2014), the researchers in the network made an inventory of the methods to measure homelessness in the participating countries. A first essential step is the definition of homelessness. There are various sources and levels of legal regulations of homelessness, like regional or national level legislation, programming documents, or local by-laws. Across the participating countries, legal definitions have at least five substantive elements: (1) lack of tenancy right/status, (2) income sufficiency to cover the cost of housing, (3) actual living situation, (4) a risk of

[1] This paragraph is based upon: Busch-Geertsema, V., N., Teller (2018), *State of the Art: Measuring Homelessness in the European Union (and in Israel). Working paper COST Action.*

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becoming homeless, and (5) administratively defined (lack of registered address). In some countries there is no legal definition, thus, any definition of homelessness would be research driven. However, some countries lack research on homelessness or have had only a short history in conducting research on homelessness, which limits the available pool of research-based definitions. Thus, based on the mapping exercise, basically these five elements which proved to be essential for legal definitions would stand also for the definitions applied in practice, in research (and policy).

In the network, we decided to use ETHOS Light as guiding framework. ETHOS Light distinguishes between 6 living situations. In comparison with the broader ETHOS typology, those staying temporarily with friends and in non-conventional housing (such as garages, garden houses) are considered homeless, while in ETHOS these living situations are considered as inadequate housing. ETHOS Light also drops persons that are threatened by eviction, since not every evicted person ends up in the streets. In ETHOS, there is one category that explicitly refers to centres for migrants, namely category 5 'people staying in institutions for immigrants', but specific reception centres for immigrants are no longer mentioned as part of category 3 ('people living in accommodation for the homeless') of ETHOS Light. Given the large diversity of living situations covered by ETHOS and ETHOS light, one specific measurement strategy is not feasible.

Concerning the specific methods, we can distinguish between the following approaches: (1) administrative databases, (2) recurrent national surveys (with individual and aggregate data), (3) one-off surveys at national level, (4) regional and local surveys (recurrent and one-off). In a number of EU countries **recurrent national** surveys on homelessness are conducted. Usually they are aiming at covering a complete picture of the homeless population at one point in time (or a specific week of the year), as a snapshot. Some of them are carried out every year, every second year or at longer time spans. One of the positive effects of these surveys is that they allow to monitor trends. In this special issue, Benjaminsen et al (2020) describe the recurrent national surveys in the Nordic countries.

One of the shortcomings is that they leave out those people who were not homeless at the day or during the week of the count, but at some other stage during the period in between. As a consequence, short-term homelessness is systematically underestimated and long-term homeless people have a much higher probability of being captured. We can distinguish here between those recurrent national surveys, which are collecting individual data and those which are collecting aggregate data. While it might sometimes be difficult to reach a national consensus on how to define and enumerate homelessness, especially in countries with a federal system, there are some interesting examples of recurrent surveys in certain **regions or at the local level**, which provide relevant information on trends and profiles of homelessness in those specific areas. In this special issue, Drilling et al (2020) analyse the city counts of Basel, Bratislava, Brussels, and Budapest. Each city develops a tailor-made method using instruments based on local context. They involve a broad range of actors (street outreach workers, services for homeless people but also for other sectors with contact to homeless people, like physical and mental health, youth, migration and addiction etc; also, public transport and street cleaning agencies etc) and a large number of volunteers and help raising awareness among the general public.

Administrative data are used for measuring the extent and the profile of the users of homelessness services. This kind of data reflects the homelessness statistics paradox, referring that the presence and use of services influences the number and profile of those counted. The paper by Thomas and Mackie in the special issue provides an analysis of 50 different data collection systems. Most often, these systems have other purposes than measurement, mainly operational purposes. The paper distinguishes between 6 design characteristics that need to be taken into account when developing such systems. However, very few systems combine all elements because of the tension between operational and research goals. In addition, the current GDPR laws complicate the collection of this kind of data.

In many EU countries progress has been made in recent years in measuring homelessness or achieving at least some regional or local trend data. It is not easy to reach a national consensus on the definition of homelessness and there is still some distance to go to have European wide comparable data on homelessness. But the European Typology on Homelessness (ETHOS) and ETHOS Light are providing a useful grid for clarification which types of homelessness are included in the definition and which aren`t. In most EU countries not all categories of ETHOS LIGHT are included in the data collection and many countries the legal definition of homelessness is not in line with the ETHOS Light. For instance, people soon to be released from institutions and people sharing with friends and relatives are particularly contentious. Also, women who are in refuge centres for victims of domestic violence are often not included in statistical counts. Another contentious category are persons living in reception centres for asylum seekers.

It is difficult, too, or perhaps even impossible to cover all homeless people in regular homelessness statistics, but as Benjaminsen et al (2020) show in this special issue, comprehensive and recurrent national homelessness surveys are feasible, if the political will exist and the necessary resources are provided. In several other countries and regions (e.g. in Ireland, the UK, in the Netherlands, Hungary, in regions of Germany and Spain) promising examples of recurrent data collections may also be found, in other countries important steps towards progress have been made.

Hidden Homelessness

Hidden homelessness seems to refer to two specific realities. On the one hand, it refers to be not counted in official statistics, counts or administrative databases. Often, these figures are based in the use of specific services for the homeless. If persons don't make use of these services, they remain hidden. On the other hand, hidden homelessness refers to two specific living situations. Hidden homelessness is used to describe a state of lacking a dedicated physical living space (your own bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, living area), lacking the privacy of your own home and having no legal rights to occupancy, i.e. no protection from eviction. Hidden homelessness includes people without their *own* address. This means people whose current address is not their own, settled home, but is housing they are unwillingly sharing, that is owned or rented by someone else, and which they have no legal right to occupy. Hidden homelessness involves a state of housing *insecurity*. Their housing is precarious, because households have no legal right to occupy the place they are living in. People in this situation *must* live in someone else's home, because they have no other choice, and other housing options are not available. This definition of 'hidden homelessness' is used in countries like Denmark, Finland, the UK and the US, where the term 'doubled-up' is employed (because two or more households are unwillingly sharing housing designed for one household).

Hidden homelessness may also be defined as including people living in housing not fit for habitation. Housing can be 'unfit' because it lacks basic amenities (no electrical power, no heating, no bathroom, no kitchen) or because it is so overcrowded that living conditions are intolerable. Definitions of whether housing is suitable for habitation are not universal, some countries have laws that require housing to be of a certain basic standard, others may have less precise regulations or laws, or lack a single standard defining what constitutes adequate housing.

Thus, hidden homelessness seems to refer to category 5 and 6 of ETHOS light. However, when taking a closer look to both living situations, some fundamental questions can be formulated. First, the duration for which someone must be in a situation of hidden homelessness before they can be regarded as being homeless, is one question. This centres on the point at which, for example, temporary 'doubling up' of two families sharing housing designed for one family, becomes 'homelessness', determining whether homelessness exists after a matter of days, weeks, or months. Defining people who are precariously housed – insecure sharing arrangements with no legal rights to occupancy – as hidden homelessness is relatively straightforward. Second, these definitions have a Northern European and North American underpinning, societies in which it is usual for families and adult couples to have their own, exclusive, adequate, safe home with at least some legal security of tenure. They are also societies in which it is not usual for multiple generations of the same family to share a home. This kind of approach can also be criticised because 'extreme' overcrowding or 'unfit' housing definitions are not consistent between countries, nor is there necessarily consensus regarding what constitutes adequate housing. Third, categorising someone as hidden homeless can have a strong stigmatising effect. This raises two questions: (1) who decides that someone is homeless and (2) to what extent do we consider the subjective experience of the person him/herself. In this special issue, Pleace and Hermans (2020) argue that exclusion from the physical and social domains is recognised as constituting a state of homelessness, so that living (unwillingly) with family, friends and acquaintances, because there is no other housing option, constitutes homelessness. Incompatibilities with all other mainstream definitions of homelessness, i.e. around asylum seekers and people living in institutional settings, also need to be modified.

Homeless Trajectories

Over the past 20 years, homelessness is more and more considered as a dynamic process instead of as a stable state. Current measurement methodologies are often point-in-time, which leads to an overestimation of those experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness. However, homelessness manifests itself on a temporal continuum as situational, episodic, or chronic, as was shown by the ground-breaking study by Kuhn and Culhane (1998). Over time, homeless individuals may experience changes in housing status that include being on the street, shared dwelling, emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing and hospitalization and incarceration in correctional facilities. Episodes of homelessness result in individual and social consequences, which are commonly detrimental to individual wellbeing and negatively affect social interactions within the community (Nooe and Patterson, 2010). Different homeless pathways need different kinds of policy measures (Culhane and Metraux, 2008).

As shown by O'Sullivan et al (2020) in this special issue, within the broad family of research into homeless trajectories, a number of distinctive traditions can be distinguished, such as a interactionist strand with an emphasis on qualitative and mostly ethnographic methods of research; a strand that develops the concept of housing / homeless careers, theoretically influenced by postmodernism, Critical Realism, risk society and utilizing qualitative interview research methods and survey data; a strand, which is (sometimes) more positivistic in orientation and utilises Randomised Control Trials to evaluate the efficacy of Housing First approaches or interventions to end family homelessness or quantitative longitudinal studies to grasp the dynamic nature of homelessness. These longitudinal studies are based on the collection of survey data (for instance, the G4 CODA study in the Netherlands, Journeys Home in Australia), on the linkage of large-scale administrative databases consisting of information from social, health, and criminal justice services, or combining data sets from various household surveys. Based on an analysis of the evidence generated by these studies in the special issue, O'Sullivan et al (2020) conclude that the majority of those experiencing homelessness experience short term episodes, and that only a minority experience entrenched or long-term homelessness. In addition, these studies also show that persons with complex needs are not the majority of the total homeless population and that these persons can be successfully housed.

Homelessness and Migration

Migration is considered as a new structural factor causing homelessness, next to more traditional structural factors such as the housing market and social welfare system. Given the growing superdiversity of European societies and the various migration channels, analysing the specific relationship between homelessness and migration is complicated but essential, as is argued for by Hermans et al (2020) in this special issue. Although migration processes differ between places, cities and countries, we see the same trends in homelessness statistics. On the one hand, a growing share of homeless service users have a migrant background. This trend is highlighted in the data offered by social services, since most of these services register nationality and/or country of birth. On the other hand, especially in larger cities, the reality on the streets is changing tremendously, not only because of the presence of irregular migrants but also because of the accessibility criteria of night shelters.

Given the insecure permit of stay of some categories of migrant persons, administrative databases don't offer much information about them. This implies that counts and surveys seem to be a more valid approach to measure migrant homelessness. The success of counts depends mainly on the cooperation with services which are in contact with these groups, especially if more specific information is gathered by means of a questionnaire. Given the ongoing criminalisation of persons with a temporary permit to stay and persons without a permit to stay as a consequence of the European migration agenda, this raises important ethical questions. What are the possible consequences for these groups, when the services they make use of, are included?

Towards A Common European Framework?

At the European level, both the European Commission and FEANTSA have put homelessness on the policy agenda of the member states. A number of countries have made progress with regard to fighting homelessness on the one hand and measuring homelessness on the other hand. In the past, the development of ETHOS, the Mphasis-study and the studies from the European Observatory on Homelessness were important drivers to contribute to a common European framework to measure homelessness. This COST network brought together experienced and new researchers interested in measuring homelessness to share their knowledge, to initiate new projects and to reflect upon current developments in homelessness research. However, the further development of a common European framework to measure homelessness is only possible if a broad array of societal actors, such as policy makers, researchers, representatives of services for the homeless and organisations of homeless persons work together.

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Articles

Part A

Migration and Homelessness: Measuring the Intersections

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Abstract_ *Given the growing superdiversity of European societies, more detailed data on migrant homelessness are needed. Measuring and monitoring the intersections between migration and homelessness needs a fundamental reflection and operationalisation of this diversity. In this contribution, we firstly look into the available evidence produced by (members of) the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) on the ways the relationship between homelessness and migration have been measured, given the important role of the EOH in bringing together the available statistics on homelessness in the EU. Secondly, we analyse the way migrant homelessness is measured in Norway, Austria, Belgium and Sweden, all relatively affluent mature welfare states, mainly receiving countries of migration. We describe which types of migrants are studied and we analyse the research designs and the specific instruments to measure migrant background. This paper shows the growing awareness of migration as a new structural factor causing homelessness, next to more traditional structural factors such as the housing market and the social welfare system. Our contribution shows that a fundamental debate is needed about the way homelessness statistics include and exclude specific groups of homeless persons.*

Keywords_ *migration, measuring homelessness, exclusion from official statistics*

Introduction

Persons experiencing homelessness are believed to have complex needs, such as enduring psychiatric vulnerability and alcohol and drug abuse (see for instance Pleace, 2016; Pleace and Hermans, in this issue). During the last 20 years, a more structural approach is applied to understand and explain homelessness (Pleace, 2016). Instead of focusing on individual characteristics and behaviour, macro-level factors are identified as causes and drivers of homelessness. These factors include housing market characteristics (such as increasing rent costs, lack of affordable housing, lack of access to housing for specific groups) and weakening social security nets (caused by austerity measures and a shift to conditionality) (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). This structural approach also points to institutional factors that complicate exiting from homelessness (such as the exclusion criteria of some services or the lack of support in case of hospital discharge). Migration was considered as a 'new' structural risk factor for homelessness by the European Observatory on Homelessness in the preparation for the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness in 2010.

Migration is a very complex societal process, however, and migration scholars such as Vertocec (2007) use the notion of superdiversity to grasp the complex qualitative and quantitative changes in migration patterns. Wessendorf (2014, p.2) considers superdiversity as a lens to describe "an exceptional demographic situation characterised by the multiplication of social categories within specific localities". Superdiversity refers to the enormous demographic changes across the world as a consequence of new migration patterns after the end of the Cold War. Until the mid-nineties, migration patterns were relatively stable and predictable, leading to specific migrant groups in different countries (often linked to decolonisation processes and specific influxes of labour migrants). As a consequence of wars and disasters, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the development of new communication technologies, many new migration patterns, and a diversification of diversity is observed.

Superdiversity has a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. The first refers to a pronounced increase of the presence of migrants and people with a migrant background, especially in (larger) European cities. The second refers to the growing diversification of diversity, in terms of ethnicities, languages, religions and legal status (residents, refugees, asylum-seekers, informal labour migrants, students, family reunion, irregular migrants). Vertovec (2007) emphasises the additional aspects of migration and legal status, which are more crucial to migrants nowadays than the "traditional" dimensions (such as country of origin, language, ethnicity and religion). These dimensions determine the legal status, and are crucial for the length of the stay, degree of autonomy (regarding employment, social rights) and access to public services and resources. Favell's (2008) notion of circular migration points to the trend of temporal migration, particularly within the EU/EEA area. It involves people seeking work abroad without the intention of long-term settlement or naturalisation. Favell (2008) characterised the East-European migrants as 'free movers, not immigrants', who move temporarily to other places because of the better economic circumstances. Favell also contrasts the new trends with more traditional forms of migration. New patterns include network migration, where family reunion is one important channel. However, the mobility of single men including both workers from East Europe and refugees/asylum seekers is also increasing (Favell, 2008). Gottlieb *et al.* (2019) refer to the diversity of migration flows as "Mixed Migration". "Mixed flows" have been defined as "complex population movements including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and other migrants". Unaccompanied minors, environmental migrants, smuggled persons, victims of trafficking and stranded migrants, among others, may also form part of a mixed flow (OSCE/ODIHR, 2018).

At the level of the EU, internal migration flows are shaped within the context of the regulations on European citizens, who are allowed freedom of movement within the EU. This right to freedom of movement is guaranteed by Article 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) and a most important element constituting a European Union. Together with the still persisting inequality concerning economies and resources among EU Member States, this freedom of movement predominately fosters migration from poor to rich EU Member States. Cheap labour is migrating from for example, Romania and Bulgaria to the rich EU Member States and these migrants are working in the labour market for low skilled workers in construction, agriculture, and care of the elderly. Many also work in the grey economy, where workers are denied social benefits and work under precarious conditions. EU migrants from poor EU Member States often are registered among the clients of NGO services for the poor, seeking shelter, food, and basic health care. For example, the 2019 Observatory Report published by Médecins du Monde shows that among the 16 per cent clientele from EU countries who were seen in MdM clinics in seven countries in Europe in 2017 and 2018, 70 per cent of those clients is from Bulgaria and Romania (Médecins du Monde, 2019). Studies in the field of health care focusing on health and migration show that homelessness is a common and relevant issue in vulnerable migrant populations (Trummer *et al.*, 2016).

Superdiversity also challenges the conceptualisation of citizenship. Citizenship came to be associated with three key values: belonging, rights and participation (Bellamy, 2008). First, citizenship involved belonging to the national community. Second, citizenship was linked to rights; individuals being treated as equals, possessing certain rights by virtue of their humanity – including social and economic rights. Finally, citizenship involved the capacity, entitlement and obligation to participate as a full and equal member within the economy and the political system.

These three values reinforced each other and resulted in a strong connection between belonging and (access to) rights. In other words, legal rights were accessible for the so-called 'birthright citizens' (Isin, 2012). As stated by Turner (2016, p.681), citizenship is an exclusive right that draws clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders in terms of access to rights. The basic tension in the modern history of citizenship is that it is normatively justified in seeking to close its borders against strangers in the interests of the security of the members of a citizenship community. Although many have questioned the relationship between territory and democracy, rights of access and residence remain fundamentally linked in an era of globalisation. Turner refers to 'type 1 denizens', namely a group of people permanently resident in a foreign country, but only enjoying limited, partial or even no rights of citizenship.

Given these various migration patterns, the growing superdiversity of European societies and the growth of type 1 denizens, more detailed data on migrant homelessness are needed. Measuring and monitoring the intersections between migration and homelessness needs a fundamental reflection about the operationalisation instruments to measure this diversity.

In this contribution, we firstly look into the available evidence produced by (members of) the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) on the ways intersections between homelessness and migration have been measured, given the important role of the EOH in bringing together the available statistics on homelessness in the EU. Secondly, we analyse the way migrant homelessness is measured in Norway, Austria, Belgium and Sweden. We choose these countries for four reasons, as shown in Table 1. First, these are all relatively affluent mature welfare states, mainly receiving countries of migration. Second, they all score above the European mean on the Migrant Integration Policy Index 2015 that reflects the migrants' opportunities to participate in society. The Index includes the migrant population with citizenship or residence permit. Third, in these countries, irregular migrants are allowed to make use of some very limited support in Sweden, Belgium and Norway (mainly specific low threshold services to meet their most basic humanitarian needs), while in Austria, they have no access to social services. Fourth, we select these four countries, since each highlight various challenging aspects of measuring migrant homelessness. We describe which types of migrants are studied and we analyse the research designs and the specific instruments to measure migrant background. Based on both parts of the paper, we formulate some recommendations to measure the intersections between migration and homelessness.

Table 1. Migration indicators of the selected four countries

	% foreign[1] pop 2005	% foreign pop 2018	% foreign born[2] 2005	% foreign born 2018	Estimates of irregular migrant population[3] 2015	MIPEX 2015[4]
Belgium	8.3	12.1	11.7	16.8	88 000-132 000	67
Norway	4.6	10.6	7.9	15.3	10 500-32 000	69
Sweden	5.3	8.9	12.2	18.8	8 000-12 000	78
Austria	9.4	15.9	14.1	19.4	18 000-54 000	50

Source: OECD (2019); OECD (2018) and MIPEX (2015)

Growing Awareness about Migration as a New Structural Driver

Since the beginning of the 2000s, there is a growing awareness about the structural effects of migration processes on homelessness. Also, the ETHOS-typology, developed in 2004 and the Mphasis study on measuring homelessness, take into account aspects of migration. The European Consensus Conference also established that homeless services are increasingly confronted with different types of migrants. Also, each comparative study by the EOH after 2010 presented some evidence on how migration is affecting the extent and profile of homelessness. In this part, we look into the work of the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH), given its important role in bringing together the available statistics on homelessness in the EU.

Before the European Consensus Conference

For the first time the problem of migrant homelessness was raised in 'Homeless in Europe', the FEANTSA magazine, in 2002 as a result of the European conference on this issue. The conclusion was that there is a severe lack of accurate and precise quantitative and qualitative data on homelessness amongst immigrants. In addition, migrant homelessness seemed to be underestimated and was considered mainly an urban phenomenon, since urban areas offer more employment opportunities and easier access to support services like advice centres, counselling, and

1 The foreign population consists of people who still have the nationality of their home country. It may include people born in the host country.

2 The foreign-born population covers all people who have ever migrated from their country of birth to their current country of residence. The foreign-born population data shown here include people born abroad as nationals of their current country of residence.

3 Migration Outlook 2018

4 The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is a unique tool which measures policies to integrate migrants in all EU Member States, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA. 167 policy indicators have been developed to create a rich, multi-dimensional picture of migrants' opportunities to participate in society. The index is a useful tool to evaluate and compare what governments are doing to promote the integration of migrants in all the countries analysed.

language courses. The little available evidence showed that single men aged 20-50 make up most of the homeless immigrant population, although homeless services have also seen a sharp rise in immigrant families and unaccompanied minors. Immigrant women were also acutely at risk of homelessness and were the largest group in centres for abused women or female victims of domestic violence.

In 2004, the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion was launched. This typology is meant to classify living situations, and is based on the three domains of home (physical, legal, social). In ETHOS, there is one category that explicitly refers to centres for migrants, namely category 5 'people staying in institutions for immigrants'. In 2007, ETHOS Light was introduced by the EOH, as a statistical instrument to measure homelessness. This is a version of the ETHOS typology developed in the context of a 2007 European Commission study: Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level (Edgar *et al*., 2007). ETHOS Light focuses on homelessness (and not housing exclusion) and distinguishes between 6 living situations. Remarkably, staying temporarily with friends and non-conventional housing (such as garages, garden houses) are considered a form of homelessness, but specific reception centres for immigrants (meant for refuges and asylum seekers) are not anymore mentioned as part of category 3 ('people living in accommodation for the homeless'). In other words, although in that period migration was regarded as an important new phenomenon that influences homelessness, it was dropped from ETHOS Light.

The MPHASIS[5]-study (Edgar and Marlier, 2009), the aim of which was to develop a common set of variables to monitor homelessness, named three specific variables that are related to migration and need to be included in homelessness statistics: nationality, country of birth and the reason for homelessness. However, the core set doesn't mention legal status. In addition accommodation services for migrants are not mentioned as the last accommodation before becoming homeless. The MPHASIS-study is still one of the main European efforts to develop a common measurement strategy and it is rather surprising that 'permit of stay' is not mentioned as a core variable, given that this variable is needed to track down which policy departments are responsible to find a solution for the specific situation and to explore to which social support the homeless person is assigned to.

The European Consensus Conference in 2010

The European Consensus Conference in 2010 was a milestone in understanding homelessness and in developing a common approach to fight homelessness in Europe. As a starting point for the conference, an academic state of the art '*Homelessness and Homelessness Policies in Europe: Lessons from Research'*

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5 Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems

(Busch-Geertsema *et al*., 2010) was carried out to summarise the available scientific evidence on homelessness. In this report, migration is identified as a new structural driver or risk factor of homelessness, referring to the way that societal trends and more specifically migration patterns, demographical and labour market trends and the geographically unequal economic development are changing homelessness fundamentally. More specifically, the literature review points to the differences in migrant homelessness between North and South Europe but also points to the situation of roofless and destitute migrants from East-European countries. In addition, refused asylum seekers and irregular migrants were recognised as a growing problem in most West-European countries. Their access to services for the homeless is described as limited. At the same time, the study stresses the need for a dynamic approach, paying attention to the interactions between structural, institutional and personal risk factors contributing to the inflow into homelessness.

The jury of the European Consensus Conference that was responsible for the formulation of the policy recommendations of the conference, pointed to the intersection between homelessness policies and migration policies. In the opinion of the jury, homeless services should not be used to systematically compensate for inconsistent migration policies that lead people to situations of destitution and homelessness. Migration policies have a responsibility to prevent migrants from entering homelessness. However, the jury also emphasises that access to homeless services must not be systematically used as a means to regulate migration. Specifically, homeless service providers should not be penalised for providing services to people presenting in need. The jury also pleaded for more research about the relationship between migration and homelessness. This rather ambiguous conclusion led to an ongoing debate in the field of homelessness services about the access to services of different groups of homeless migrants, especially those denizens with less legal and social rights.

After the Consensus Conference

Pleace (2010) aimed to update and critically assess FEANTSA's work on migrant homelessness. He points to the lack of valid and reliable data on migrant homelessness, but also the varying legal and conceptual definitions of who a migrant is. This is especially important since undocumented migrants tend to conceal themselves for fear of repatriation. Based on a review of the available evidence, Pleace (2010) distinguished five types of migrants in relation to homelessness: (1) asylum seekers and refugees, (2) failed asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, (3) women and children from outside the EU who lose their immigration status when escaping domestic violence, (4) homelessness among A-10 migrant workers (a person from the A10 countries that joined the EU in May 2004, including Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia), and (5) ethnic and cultural minorities who are not recent migrants. Pleace (2010) pleaded for EU-wide monitoring or surveys to understand the extent, nature and implications of migrant homelessness. More data were needed, particularly to ensure that the scale and nature of undocumented migrant and A-10 economic migrant homelessness is properly understood. However, no clear methodological guidelines concerning collection and operationalisation were supplied.

In 2014, the European Observatory on Homelessness published a new, extensive study on the extent and profile of homelessness in European Member States, based on country reports from experts (Busch-Geertsema *et al*., 2014). In the part dealing with profile characteristics, the study brought together all relevant information on 'ethnic background' in the 10 Member States. Under this heading, different categorisations of migrant homelessness were discussed, such as undocumented migrants, persons with a foreign background, ethnic minorities, Roma people, persons with a foreign nationality and also 'Black British' and 'Asian British' homeless persons. This enumeration shows that migrant homelessness is operationalised very differently in the participating Member States. This operationalisation refers to different aspects of migrant homelessness, but also shows the lack of a common and uniform set of variables to measure migrant homelessness. Not only the operationalisation of ethnic background varies (what is counted), but the study also reveals different answers to the question 'who is counted'. This can be linked to data collection. In surveys, it is easier to gather relevant information on ethnic background than in administrative databases. But even in surveys, the study points to various practices. For instance, undocumented migrants do not appear in the Danish homelessness statistics, although separate estimates of homeless migrants are produced, while in Italy, the 2011 survey included undocumented migrants as part of the homeless population.

In 2016, a new study by the EOH focused on the consequences of the humanitarian crisis in 12 European Member States and distinguished between three subgroups, namely asylum applicants (those who have asked for asylum and are waiting to be assessed), refugees (in this report, this term is used to cover people granted international protection, including refugee status or subsidiary forms of protection that give them the right to remain in an EU Member State) and people whose asylum application has been refused. Based on the country reports, the report clarifies the various effects of the humanitarian crisis on services for homeless people. Concerning rejected asylum seekers, the study states that there are not many figures available and that they are often supported by faith-based organisations and citizen initiatives. Remarkably, this study concludes that the ETHOS typology of homelessness includes people in reception centres and other accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees as being homeless. The definition has been contested, as it makes no allowance for time. A refugee or asylum seeker, in such a situation, may not be there for very long and may move straight into housing once they leave. Migrant populations are also not a group of people that governments are eager to count as 'homeless' and, by implication, in need of support, which might include being housed. The last comparative study by the EOH focused in 2017 on family homelessness and included numbers on migrant family homelessness, but in rather general terms (European Observatory on Homelessness, 2017).

Defining and Measuring Homelessness

Based on this review, three conclusions are made. First, with regard to the definition of homelessness, we notice an important change as a consequence of the introduction of ETHOS Light. While ETHOS specifically refers to accommodation for migrants as a specific living situation, ETHOS Light only speaks of temporary accommodation. ETHOS Light is developed for research purposes and practice because of its simplicity (see for instance Demaerschalk and Hermans, 2018), but its use in practice creates room for interpretation concerning the specific operationalisation of category 3. The same applies to the interpretation of category 4, namely are persons in reception centres for refugees also considered institutional leavers? Second, the Mphasis study, which is still considered an important milestone in the measurement of homelessness, does not include legal status as a specific variable. There is also no specific attention to refugees nor to specific minority groups (such as Roma). Third, in the relevant EOH studies that were produced after the Mphasis study, we note that many different categories are linked to migrant homelessness.

Measurement Issues in Four Countries

In this section, we explore how four different European countries are dealing with the measurement of (migrant) homelessness. Table 1 (above) shows that in the selected countries, the share of foreigners in the total populations has increased tremendously during the last 15 years, especially in Norway. The largest migrant group in Norway is Polish people, who also represent much of the fast increase after 2004 (Table 1). The Poles integrate well with Norwegian society (Søholt and Lynnebakke 2015), or they are part of the circular migration flow. Concerning irregular migrants, the high numbers in Belgium can be noticed, compared to the other three countries. With regard to Migration and Integration Policies Index, the four countries have a higher score than the European mean. The lower score of Austria can be mainly explained by the more difficult access to voting and to the naturalisation procedure. We not only selected these countries because of these general migration patterns, but also because they highlight various measurement issues.

Belgium

Belgium is a very complex state, consisting of three regions, three communities and a federal state. The regions are responsible for housing policies, while social welfare services are steered by the communities. Social security is still a federal competence. In 2014, an interfederal agreement on the fight against homelessness was signed by all the policy actors of the federal state, the regions and the communities. This agreement pleas for an interfederal coordination of the measurement of homelessness based on the ETHOS typology. Since 2014, the different policy levels launched their own homelessness policies, but an interfederal coordination of the measurement of homelessness is still missing. The different policy regions have their own data collection methods, which leads to regional numbers, but these are not comparable on the national level. Demaerschalk *et al.* (2018) developed a common strategy to monitor homeless on the Belgian level, based on scientific evidence and the input of all stakeholders (policy makers, NGO and poverty organisations). The study pleas for the use of ETHOS Light as a guiding framework for data collection in Belgium. However, the study states that one specific method of data collection cannot give information about all the categories. The study recommends a combination of data collection methods, consisting of (1) a national count based on the Nordic model, (2) the exploitation of the administrative social security databases, (3) specific data collection on evictions and waiting lists for social housing, and (4) national statistics based on the affordability and quality of housing based on EU SILC. In 2020, the methodology of the count is operationalised in various cities throughout the country. In these city counts, information is gathered about the nationality, the country of birth and the permit of stay.

With regard to the available Belgian evidence, there are no specific studies on the relationship between migration and homelessness. The first Flemish homelessness count in 2014 was a service-based and questionnaire-based count following the Mphasis guidelines and focused on ETHOS 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 (Meys and Hermans, 2015). Sixteen per cent of the users of night shelters are persons who have no permit of stay. In addition, the focus groups with practitioners made clear that these night shelters use different accessibility criteria. In some shelters, persons without a permit to stay are refused. In the night shelters, almost half of the users do not have a Belgian or other European nationality. Long-term residential services and transitional housing programmes are not accessible for undocumented migrants. One half of the users of residential services and a third of the users of transitional housing programmes do not have a Belgian or other European nationality.

In Brussels, La Strada is responsible for the collection of data. Their data collection strategy consists of two instruments. On the one hand, they organise a two-yearly city count. On the other hand, they have developed a procedure for a unique client identification to link data from different services. The last count of 2018 showed that a new citizen initiative BXL refugees (Burgerinitiatief) housed 685 persons. They did so in large centres (350 persons in Porte d'Ulysse and Haren), other smaller collective centres (87 persons) and in family homes (248 persons) (Quittelier, 2019). Three hundred and thirty-three persons were counted in negotiated occupations (squatting based on a special agreement with the public services). This is considered a housing 'solution' for undocumented migrants; living in such an accommodation often free or at a very low price. In 2016, 587 persons were counted in squats, 165 more than in 2014 even though several large squats had been closed. The number dropped again in 2018 because of the citizen initiative. The new anti-squat law from 2017 led to a shift from squats to negotiated occupations. The Brussels centres for asylum seekers (Fedasil, Caritas, Leger des Heils, Minor nDako, Samusocial) were only included in the two last counts in 2016 and in 2017. In 2018, La Strada reports the public institutions for asylum seekers do not regard the persons they shelter as homeless. The Brussels count is a combination of a street count and specific data collection in cooperation with specific services. The street count is organised on a specific evening and is mainly a head count. As a consequence, less information on migration issues is collected.

The methodological strength of the Brussels count is that they demonstrate trends concerning category 1 and 2 of ETHOS. In addition, the Brussels count has a strong tradition to also grasp those living in squats (category 8 in ETHOS / category 6 of ETHOS Light). But this is only possible if the methodology remains standardised. However, as these results show, when the reality on the streets and in the city is changing, an important question is whether or not to cooperate with new actors and services that are in contact with migrants. Since this type is based on the cooperation with services, the selection and cooperation of services strongly influences the results. For instance, Fedasil, the Belgian authority concerning migration policies, does not recognise its own services as part of ETHOS 4.

Norway

Norway organises a four-yearly national count, which consists of two steps: (1) mapping services in contact with or who know of homeless persons, and 2) these services fill in one questionnaire for each homeless person they know of during a time window of one week. The registration is carried out in one specific week (week 48 or 49). The method, and mainly the same operational definitions of homelessness, is applied in homeless surveys in Denmark and Sweden (Benjaminsen *et al.*, this issue). The first national survey was carried out in 1996, at a time when migration connected to homelessness was not a theme in the discussion neither in Norway nor in other European countries. The first homeless surveys included a question about the person's place of birth operationalised in the crude categories of regions and continents, in addition to 'Norway'. The majority of homeless persons, four out of five, captured in the surveys are born in Norway. For comparison, 15 per cent of the Norwegian population has migrant status. However, 'migrant status' also includes persons born in Norway with both parents who have immigrated, and thus embraces a wider group than those registered with place of birth outside Norway in the homeless surveys. Persons with migrant status may be included in the category 'born in Norway'.

Increased migration flows, particularly labour migration from other EU countries, but also refugees from other parts of the world, set migration and homelessness on the agenda with regard to the national homeless surveys. In 2012, a question about persons staying temporarily in the country was included in the survey and repeated in 2016 (also in the planned survey in 2020). The question aims to include persons with limited rights to services due to migration status, and embraces a wide diversity from failed job seekers from EU countries to undocumented refugees including "unreturnable". In 2012, 307 persons staying temporarily were reported in the country (Dyb and Johannessen, 2013), and 169 persons in 2016 (Dyb and Lid, 2017). These numbers are assessed as being highly underreported (assessed in dialogue with the services). As mentioned above, the registration of homeless persons is conducted by employees in the services. Services in contact with homeless migrants are largely based on voluntary work, and due to ethical and practical issues it is difficult to include the group in the count. Results from the last survey shows that 40 per cent of persons staying temporarily in the country are coming from EU countries, 30 per cent from Africa and 20 per cent from Asian countries. Thirty-six per cent of them are living rough or making use of overnight shelters, 18 per cent are temporarily staying with friends and for 23 per cent their place to stay is unknown. In addition, their profile differs significantly from the majority of the national homeless population: one in ten have an addiction (vs 60 per cent in national homeless population), very few report a mental health problem (vs one in three), and very few have experienced eviction in the last six months (vs one third). Statistics about asylum seekers and refugees in reception centres who had their application accepted is made available by the migration authorities. These persons are entitled to housing and support for a period of three years. They are counted as homeless only if the deadline for settlement set by the government is overdue.

Another available source containing information about migration and homelessness is the annual report by the Health Centre for undocumented migrants in Oslo. The Centre is run by the City Mission and Oslo Red Cross (Oslo City Mission/Oslo Red Cross, 2018) and partly funded by the central government and the city of Oslo, but largely dependent on volunteers. The report describes the development among the users of the Centre from the opening in 2009 to the end of 2018. The Centre offers a wide range of health services to people without a residence permit in Norway, such as (1) asylum seekers with final rejection (after appeal), (2) persons not registered in the Norwegian system, (3) persons with an overdue permit of residence/visa or having their residence permission or citizenship withdrawn, (4) persons expelled from the country, and (5) poor visitors in the country without other opportunities for health care. The Centre opened in 2009 after a mapping among undocumented migrants, showing that the group had significant unmet humanitarian needs, in particular concerning health. Since the opening in 2009, the Centre has treated almost 4 500 persons from 120 countries. After a peak in the number of new patients in 2014/2015, there has been a slight decrease in the number of new patients. The user groups have changed during nearly ten years in operation. The number of asylum seekers has decreased due to a stricter policy on admission to the country and a more efficient return of people with rejected applications. The registration of nationality is based on the information given by the patients, like nationality "Kurdistan". Nationality does not always provide information about where people have lived most of the life, or where they were born. Some patients were born in a refugee camp and are without citizenship. The last annual report (2018) contained a specific chapter about migration and homelessness. Users of the centre are sleeping rough or make use of an overnight shelter/emergency shelter. Many patients use the overnight shelters for travellers, run by the City Mission and Red Cross, and to some extent the winter shelter for all in need run by Salvation Army, or living in nonconventional dwellings. Living temporarily with family and friends is rather unusual but may occur. Some groups, like migrant Roma people, come with a network or family, but the network members have no access to housing (Djuve *et al*., 2015). Other groups have little or no network of support.

Other large municipalities offer some low threshold services for migrants, but there are no available figures about the housing situation among the users of these facilities. Some of the services participate in the national homeless surveys. In addition to the very limited sources of data about homelessness and migration, a few qualitative studies show how homeless migrants and migrants living as homeless in Norway (some might have a dwelling in another country) experience very precarious living conditions without accessing mainstream welfare service (Mostowska, 2013; Djuve *et al*., 2015). The strength of the Norwegian (and Nordic) homeless surveys is that mainstream services, not only services designated for homeless people, are included in the respondent group, which captures "invisible homelessness" like sofa surfers and other homeless people who do not use services for the homeless. To include data on homeless migrants with limited or no access to assistance, it is probably necessary to supplement with other methods, like for example conducting city counts aimed at these groups.

Austria

In Austria, the number of homeless people increased by 21 per cent between 2008 and 2017, according to Statistik Austria. Numbers are provided on the basis of registration data in combination with data provided by homeless services. The official national statistics office indicates 21 567 registered homeless people for 2017. People with a main residence confirmation as roofless (entry with "O" in the central register) and people who are registered in one of 140 facilities for homeless people (the homeless) are added together; 13 926 are recorded as roofless and 8 688 are registered as staying in homeless services. However, institutions focusing on homeless women and refugees, and institutions specifically providing housing for homeless elderly people, are not taken into account. In order to make comparisons possible, the yearly statistics on homeless persons are based on the institutions covered in the 2011 registry census.

The status 'roofless' can be issued by the local registration office if the homeless individual can verify that he or she has been staying in the respective municipality for at least one month and can name a contact point that he or she visits regularly. The 'contact point' also serves as an address for services, e.g. receiving social transfers or post, if the owner of the contact point agrees. Contact points may be private addresses, homeless assistance institutions, or facilities for probationary services, social counselling or addiction counselling. Probably, the total amount of roofless persons will be higher than recorded, since not every person will have such a contact point. The sum of the roofless and homeless persons is not 21 567, since the total is adjusted for double counting. These data cover people according to the ETHOS Light operational categories 1 and 2, and part of 3 (excluding women's shelters or refuge accommodation (Fink, 2019). The calculation method has been changed in 2017. Instead of previously limiting the count of homeless people to four reference days, the new calculation method considers all people who have had at least one episode of homelessness during the course of the year.

Profile characteristics of roofless and homeless persons are only available for two specific years, namely 2011 and 2012. Bauer and Klapfer (2015) provide data calculated according to a concept closely related to the one presented above. On the one hand, their results only cover two reference dates (31 October 2011 and 31 October 2012), but used a much more elaborated list of homeless services. In 2012, 40 per cent of registered homeless people in Austria had not been born in Austria, while the share for the whole population was 16 per cent at this time, and points out that migrants were substantially overrepresented among the homeless (Fink, 2019). A detailed analysis of the same data contains absolute numbers of homeless migrants for 2012 per country (group) of birth. The largest group has been born in an EU country (n=1 306), 758 have been born in former Yugoslavia (excl. Slovenia), 352 in Turkey, 874 in other European countries, 630 in Africa, 815 in Asia, and 87 in other countries. Remarkably, two thirds of the persons with a non-Austrian nationality can be mainly found in the category of roofless people, while almost 60 per cent of the Austrian homeless persons can be found in specific services. This can be explained by the specific access criteria of these services (Fink, 2019). The 2018 data on registered numbers of homeless people show that 10 020 homeless people are non-Austrian citizens (44 per cent).

On the regional level, a yearly service-based homelessness survey in Salzburg shows that 35 per cent of the counted homeless persons have Austrian nationality. Twenty-seven per cent of the counted persons are refugees (Fink, 2019). The conclusion of the 2017 report is that the group of homeless refugees is growing. They have a legal permit of stay in the country and have in theory the same rights as Austrian citizens. In other words, counting refugee status as a specific profile characteristic seems to be very relevant, given the Austrian example. For Vienna, the Fonds Soziales Wien, the Viennese social services counted almost 3 000 people who used the so-called winter package for homeless people, which is accessible regardless of nationality and legal status during the winter of 2018. About 75 per cent were non-Austrian citizens. In 2012/13, their share was 66 per cent. People from Slovakia, Romania, Hungary (more than 10 per cent each) and Poland made the majority of this population. There are no numbers available on homeless irregular migrants or on people affected by hidden homelessness, staying with family and friends due to homelessness and not registered at authorities.

Sweden

The municipalities have responsibility for housing provision in Sweden. There are 290 municipalities in the country and most of them have a lack of housing. There is however great variation concerning the extent and profile of homelessness in these municipalities. Homelessness exists in rural areas too, but is concentrated in the urban areas and especially the three largest cities in Sweden. The first national homelessness count in Sweden was executed in 1993. Since then, they are conducted every sixth year. Like Norway and Denmark, this count is based on two phases: first mapping the services that get into touch with homeless persons and then filling in the questionnaires. Between the first homelessness count in 1993 and the most recent one in 2017, the number of homeless people doubled (Knutagård *et al.*, 2019). After 2011, the number of homeless people stabilised, possibly explained by the fact that fewer municipalities participated in the 2017 count. On 3–9 April 2017, 33 250 individuals in Sweden are in one of the four situations associated with homelessness (NBHW, 2017). Almost half (15 900) of the individuals had some type of long-term housing arrangement (situation 3) during the week in question. The next largest group (5 900) were acutely homeless (situation 1). In this situation, 41 per cent were women. Domestic violence was reported to be a contributing factor to the acute homelessness situation for one third of women. Approximately 650 of the people were sleeping outdoors or in a public space. More than 5700 individuals had private short-term living arrangements in other person's homes (situation 4). The smallest group (4900) were staying at various kinds of institutions or assisted living facilities and had no place to live after their scheduled discharge or move (situation 2).

The 2017 count showed that almost half of the homeless population lived in long-term housing arrangements. It also showed an increase in the number of acutely homeless people (i.e. ETHOS Light categories 1, 2, 3 and 5) and a large increase in the number of homeless people within the secondary housing market. The secondary housing market constitutes apartments that the social services rent from housing companies and then sublet to their clients. Moreover, the 2017 survey indicated that the profile of the homeless population had changed. An increasing number of homeless persons were women and an increasing number had a migrant background. In the count, this is defined as 'non-Swedish' nationality (foreign born). Almost half of the counted persons and families have a migrant background in 2017 (Knutagård, 2018). The proportion of people with a foreign background has increased from 23 per cent in 1993 to 43 per cent in 2017.

Some groups are excluded from the national count even though they live in a homeless situation: people without a residence permit, unaccompanied minors, undocumented migrants, mobile EU citizens and newly arrived migrants. One conclusion is that there are no real good mappings on the extent of homelessness among the groups of migrants that are excluded from the definition. In 2013, an extra mapping was conducted after the 2011 mapping. The aim of the mapping was to count the number of homeless so-called mobile EU citizens. The mapping concluded that there were 370 homeless persons in this category. Two years later the estimate was about 5000 homeless people that were mobile EU citizens.

There have been some important changes in national legislations. During the humanitarian crisis in 2015, new legislation was introduced. In the spring of 2016, the Housing Act began to apply. The purpose was to give newly arrived refugees a good introduction and integration by directing them to municipalities with relatively good labour markets, which were obliged to arrange housing for them. For most municipalities the first two years of the housing provision worked well, but the state funding ended after two years and the legislation didn't specify what type of housing that should be provided, so after the first two-year cycle, there is a tendency that municipalities start to move out refugees from their housing to more temporary solutions.

A recent development is the distinction between so-called social homeless and structural homeless in two of the largest cities in Sweden (Gothenburg and Malmö). In the latter group, we find households that often have a migrant background. They are not eligible for help. They call this new municipal procedure “acute benefits”. These new guidelines for the municipal social workers say that structural homeless people are people that do not have any other problems than lack of housing. Therefore, they should look for housing on their own on the open housing market. Most of them will not be able to get an apartment on their own, since they lack employment, funding or previous references from a landlord in Sweden. If they have children and they cannot find housing, the social services will provide emergency housing on a weekly basis. That means that children might have to move from place to place after a week’s placement at a hostel or similar type of emergency accommodation. In Malmo, two thirds of all homeless persons are considered as ‘structural homeless’ (Sahlin, 2020).

We have only seen the beginning of what the consequences will be, but most likely, structurally homeless families will become socially homeless families over the course of time. What is important here is that it is problematic to categorise individuals as either social or structural homeless, instead of categorising the causes of homelessness as either social or structural. Defining individuals and households as structurally homeless and as such depriving them of assistance from the social services leads to a situation where they are defined as “rightless”, or belonging to a state of exception (Hansson and Mitchell, 2018). In several municipalities local homelessness counts are conducted on a yearly basis. Both Gothenburg and Malmö have seen a dramatic decrease in the total homelessness population. In Gothenburg, it is a decrease of 26 per cent and in Malmö a 31 per cent decrease for adults and a 49 per cent decrease in the number of homeless children. The decrease in the homelessness population is connected to the structural homelessness population. There are however great uncertainties whether the decrease in the homelessness numbers can be related to interventions by the social services, or if the reduction can be ascribed to the exclusion of structurally homeless people from the local definition of homelessness.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper shows the growing awareness of migration as a new structural factor causing homelessness, next to more traditional structural factors such as the housing market and social welfare system. Given the growing superdiversity of European societies, the circular migration of specific migrant groups and the unclear access to homelessness services, measuring the specific relationship between homelessness and migration is complicated, but essential. Although migration processes differ between places, cities and countries, we see the same trends in the reviewed studies and countries. On the one hand, a growing share of homeless service users have a migrant background. This trend is evident in Austria, Belgium and Sweden, since most of these services register nationality and/or country of birth. In Norway the vast majority of the service users are Norwegians. Homeless people without or with temporary residence permit are denied access to regular services. On the other hand, the reality on the streets is changing tremendously, not only because of the presence of irregular migrants but also because of the accessibility criteria of night shelters (as shown in the example of Austria). This new reality is less evident in the available homelessness statistics of the studied countries.

It is difficult to get accurate statistics on who is homeless and what is counted as homelessness at a given time. The different countries show that several groups are excluded from the homelessness definitions and are operationalised very differently. One group that stand out and where the estimations from the different countries vary a lot is the number of irregular migrants. The way people experiencing homelessness are defined and categorised leads to a situation where people who actually live in a homelessness situation – on the streets or in temporary shelters – are not counted as homeless, while, as the Swedish case elucidates, people who live in regular apartments but with a second-hand contract are defined as homeless. At the same time, migration policies are designed to prevent migrants from becoming homeless in the first place and governments are reluctant to count refugees as homeless. Sahlin (2020) argues that for many homeless groups they run the risk of being a moving target. When social services recategorise a person, it can result in a move from the position of being entitled to being non-entitled, and as such being responsible for your own housing situation. As stated by Turner (2016, p.681), citizenship is an exclusive right that draws clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders in terms of access to rights. Homelessness policies and services are increasingly confronted by what Turner calls ‘type 1 denizens’, namely a group of people permanently resident in a foreign country, but only enjoying limited, partial or even no rights of citizenship. The examples of Austria and Sweden show how regular migrants with full rights have difficulties to get full access to housing support and welfare services.

In the literature, three specific methods are discerned to measure and monitor homelessness in general: administrative databases, recurrent surveys and one-off surveys (Edgar *et al*., 2007). Given the insecure permit of stay of some categories of migrant persons, administrative databases don’t offer much information about them. This implies that counts and surveys seem to be a more valid approach to measure migrant homelessness. The success of counts depends mainly on the cooperation with services that are in contact with these groups, especially if more specific information is gathered by means of a questionnaire. If the homeless population is changing, this also implies the need to broaden the cooperation with other services (including informal actors and volunteer organisations that are in contact with them, as is shown in the Belgian example). An even more important question is who is included in counts and homelessness statistics, as is shown by the examples of Sweden and Norway. In addition, small changes, such as adding one question about permit of stay in a national count can have an impact on homelessness statistics, if this group is included in the statistics. For instance, in Norway adding this question does not affect the official number, since this group is treated separately. The comparison between the countries show that a mixed-method strategy for counting homelessness including a national survey, a broad spectrum of services to include administrative data and city or street counts is needed to grasp the complex reality of homelessness. There is however a risk of viewing homelessness counts as facts, which can lead to a situation where we are viewing like a state and our trust in numbers fail to recognise that excluded groups from official definitions are actually experiencing a real homelessness situation and where their position in society is diminished from being a citizen to becoming a denizen (Porter, 1995; Turner, 2016). Another important issue concerns the ethical questions surrounding counting irregular homeless migrants. What are the possible consequences for these groups, when the services they make use of are included in homelessness counts? Is an attitude of 'functional ignorance' of the services that are in contact with them needed? Functional ignorance refers to the practice of ignoring the permit of stay of persons that would exclude them from service provision and providing them support (Karl-Tummer *et al*., 2010). This ignorance becomes functional to safeguard ethically sound action for the price of not being able to collect better evidence on the situation of the most vulnerable migrant groups.

Our contribution shows that a fundamental debate is needed about the way homelessness statistics include and exclude specific groups of homeless persons: who is counted and which characteristics are measured? At the same time, we have to remain aware of the risk of a cultural model of homelessness that reduces the causes of homelessness to cultural factors, if we do not consider the complex interaction between migration policies, social policies and structural factors such as the housing and labour market. These complex exclusion mechanisms can't be grasped purely by homelessness statistics or by only measuring migration variables. As advocated by Zufferey (2019, p.2), an intersectional approach is needed that considers how multiple social locations such as age, race, ethnicity, social class, socioeconomic status, mental and physical dis/abilities intersect to disadvantage and privilege different groups.

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Counting All Homelessness in Europe: The Case for Ending Separate Enumeration of 'Hidden Homelessness'

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Abstract_ *This paper explores the challenges around the measurement of all homelessness in Europe. The paper begins by reviewing challenges in relation to definition and measurement and moves on to consider the political and ethical dimensions of measuring homelessness that occurs within housing. The paper concludes by proposing new definitions, including dropping the term 'hidden homelessness', and advocates properly resourced and directed social research. It is argued that physical-legal definitions have proven unsatisfactory in the face of evidence about the importance of the psychological and emotional dynamics around the meaning of home, and that there are ethical questions around imposing categorisations of homelessness on populations who might not see themselves or their situation in such terms. However, while it is argued that there is a need to acknowledge these challenges, there is also an imperative to create a concise, practical and measurable European definition of homelessness.*

Keywords_ *homelessness enumeration, hidden homelessness*

Introduction: Challenges in Definition and Measurement

To define someone as homeless requires a working definition of what constitutes a home. The practical challenges for defining and measuring all homelessness, which is not a precise concept, as this paper will go on to explore, have always been twofold. The first problem centres on agreeing the definitional lines around where homelessness starts and stops. The second problem centres on the considerable logistical challenges in physically counting, or even accurately estimating, the nature and extent of much of the homeless population. This second problem exists as soon as it is accepted that homelessness can exist *within* housing, whether the definition of 'homelessness' being used is either relatively broad, or relatively narrow.

Definition

In Europe, people who are living rough (street homeless), in encampments or in emergency accommodation or other designated homelessness services that offer temporary accommodation, are usually defined as homeless (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). Several countries draw distinctions within this group, for example, the UK and Ireland differentiate between living rough and living in homelessness services (MHCLG, 2019; DRHE, 2019). Finland draws a distinction between those living rough and in basic emergency shelters and other elements within the homeless population, including people having to share overcrowded homes with others because they have nowhere else to go (ARA, 2020). Outside Europe, the USA counts 'unsheltered' and 'sheltered' homeless populations (HUD, 2019).

From a public policy perspective, someone who is living rough, in an emergency shelter, or in temporary accommodation for homeless people, can be easily defined as 'homeless'. This is because they have no living space of their own, let alone something that is fit for habitation, physically safe, private and for which their right to residence is protected by law. Within this definition, as several countries do, it is possible to subdivide between those regarded as experiencing the extremes of homelessness, i.e. living rough and those in shelters or temporary accommodation. Definition is simple, because the people being categorised are in living in external and internal spaces that are widely recognised as homeless *places*.

The idea that someone could be in housing, but also homeless, is not a new one. A 1977 UK law said someone was 'homeless' if they had no accommodation that they could reasonably be expected to occupy[1]. If housing was unsafe (including risk of domestic violence), physically unfit for habitation (including severe over-crowding), or insecure, because it was going to be lost within 28 days, someone was legally *defined* as being homeless (Lowe, 1997). Definition as homeless did not, in itself, make someone eligible for assistance from the State, which remains the

1 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1977/48/section/1/enacted

case across most of the UK, with the important exception of Scotland (Anderson, 2019). Nevertheless, UK public policy has been working on the basis that homelessness can exist *within housing* for over forty years. The French legal definition, introduced in 2008, has similarities, again including roofless people but also tenants facing eviction with no prospect of rehousing; people in temporary accommodation and people placed in housing considered to be substandard or unfit. As in the UK, households in unfit housing that contain one or more dependent children or someone with a limiting illness are prioritised. In 2012, this was extended to anyone, again in existing housing, who had been waiting on the social housing list for an abnormally long time (Loison, 2007). The Danish and the Finnish statistics, while not rooted in a legal definition of homelessness, also encompass a similar definition of households in extremes of insecurity or overcrowding as being 'homeless', again including people staying with family or friends who have a roof over their head (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; ARA, 2019); this is also the case in Norway and Sweden (Dyb, 2017).

Yet while the idea of being housed and yet still homeless is relatively widespread in Northern Europe, definitions used elsewhere tend to focus on rough sleeping and/or people living in emergency accommodation for homeless people. This is the case in several Eastern European, e.g. Hungary, Poland, and Southern European countries, e.g. Italy and Spain, where literal homelessness (living on the street or in an unregulated shelter, like a homeless encampment) or in accommodation designed to offer shelter to people who would otherwise be homeless, constitutes the official and statistical definition of 'homelessness' (Baptista *et al.*, 2012; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA, 2020).

The European Typology of Homelessness (ETHOS) (Edgar and Meert, 2005) identifies multiple situations in which both housed, and otherwise accommodated people should be defined as 'homeless' and has shaped debate at EU level and beyond (Amore *et al.*, 2011). ETHOS uses three 'domains', adequate accommodation over which someone can exercise exclusive possession (spatial domain), in which there is control over access, privacy and space for social relationships (social domain) and which they have a legal right to occupy (legal domain) (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; Busch Geertsema *et al.*, 2016).

ETHOS is centred around a set of physical-legal variables being wholly absent, partially present or wholly present, to create a continuum of measurement ranging between homeless and home (Edgar *et al.*, 2007; Busch-Geertsema, 2010). The approach tries to control for social effects, including living situations that do not offer private space for social relationships, as one of the components of homelessness and housing exclusion.

These three domains of the physical, social and legal are used as a conceptual framework. ETHOS includes seven broad types of homelessness[2]. Someone is homeless if they are excluded from all three domains, or from the legal and social domains, i.e. no legal title to occupation and no private space. However, exclusion from the physical and social domains is not defined as homelessness, rather as being housing exclusion. The logic here is that legal rights to occupy housing forms the line between being homeless and being (very) poorly housed. To use one example, someone at risk of domestic violence and abuse, but with legal rights to occupy their current housing (who would, for example, be defined as homeless under UK law), is *not* classified as homeless by ETHOS. It seems strange that someone who is physically unsafe in their own home is not classified as 'homeless' by ETHOS (Bretherton, 2017 and 2020).

There are also some inconsistencies in the detail of ETHOS. People living temporarily with friends or family are classified as in a state of 'housing' exclusion, but they are excluded from both the legal and social domains, which is interpreted elsewhere as a state of homelessness. Equally, someone living in a temporary or non-conventional structure, which could be on illegally occupied land, is also defined as experiencing housing exclusion (Amore *et al.*, 2011; Sahlin, 2012). ETHOS also classifies groups of people who are about to be discharged from institutions, such a prison and long stay hospitals, as 'homeless', without qualifying this by limiting it to people without a home to go to when they leave. Immigrants in reception or short-term accommodation due to their status are also classified as homeless (see Hermans *et al*, in this issue), which is not a definition any European government would accept.

ETHOS Light, a simplified version of the typology which was designed to support measurement of homelessness at European level, reclassifies people living temporarily with family or friends as 'homeless' (Busch Geertsema, 2010). Neither ETHOS, nor ETHOS Light define unfit housing, i.e. much too small, in very poor repair, or physically unsafe as constituting a state of homelessness.

ETHOS has been important in advancing debates about the nature and breadth of experience of homelessness, shifting perceptions that it is just about rough sleeping. Canada and New Zealand made reference to ETHOS in development of homelessness statistics. However, the definition has incompatibility with some elements of mainstream understanding of homelessness. Denmark and Finland, the UK and other countries also regard people staying with friends or family because they have nowhere else to go, or young people 'sofa surfing' as homeless

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2 https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion

(Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). At present, definitional ambiguities around who is homeless and who is experiencing housing exclusion or acute housing need have yet to be resolved at European level.

Another challenge centres on ideas about minimum physical standards and what constitutes overcrowding reflects the differing cultural and socioeconomic norms in different European countries. A shorthand for this is intergenerational living in Europe. Several generations of the same family are, broadly speaking, more likely to live together under the same roof in some parts of Europe and less likely to do so in others. Different countries have different minimum standards in relation to space, overcrowding, number and use of rooms, utilities or thermal efficiency. Homelessness is sometimes defined in terms of housing being physically unfit for habitation and overcrowding, ideas about what constitutes 'unacceptable' housing, that it is not reasonable for someone to occupy, are not consistent across Europe.

Measurement

Definition is not always followed by enumeration. French (Join-Lambert, 2009) and Spanish (Sales, 2015) national surveys do not encompass rural areas and smaller towns, which means that at least some of the homeless populations are not recorded. In France and the UK, there are differences between what is defined as homelessness legally and recorded in administrative systems and data collection on homelessness as a whole. France counts people living rough, in emergency shelters and in temporary accommodation, albeit in a survey that does not cover smaller towns and rural areas, the UK has administrative data on people seeking assistance under homelessness laws, which vary by the four devolved national jurisdictions and England counts people living rough, but does not collect data on people in emergency and temporary accommodation who are homeless, but not able to gain assistance under the law.

A lot of homelessness is difficult to count. Lohmann (2021) reports some success in surveying householders in Germany about whether or not they had accommodated people who had nowhere else to go or stay. However, broad challenges exist in finding homeless people who are not relatively easily detected by surveys that are targeted on emergency and temporary accommodation intended for homeless populations. Homeless people can be found and counted in three ways: via contact with social protection/social housing systems recording details of applicants' living situations; when homelessness is found by either dedicated surveys or within sample surveys of the whole population and, depending on how data are collected, when a country undertakes a census.

When visibility and enumeration depend on contact with social protection and social housing systems, those who do not contact these systems are not counted. Administrative systems also tend to associate people with their home addresses, because many public services operate on a decentralised basis, covering specific geographical areas, with housing, health, education and welfare often being administered with systems that expect local connection to be demonstrated via an address (Baptista *et al.*, 2015). These systems are not designed to find or connect with someone with no fixed, indeed no legal, address.

Population sample surveys are hampered by the relative *rarity* of homelessness. This does not mean that the problem does not impact on a significant number of people, rather it is the case that when, typically, a few thousand households are being sampled out of millions, the chances that they will land on housing containing people experiencing homelessness within housing, e.g. staying with friends or relatives because they have nowhere else to go, are small (ONS, 2014).

Concealed or 'doubled up' households, such as two families living in housing designed for one, need to be in that situation at the point data are collected. Equally, people whose homelessness is inherently mobile, moving between the floor, sofa or spare room of one family member, friend or acquaintance after another, will again need to be in that situation to be found, and recorded, by a census or a sample survey. Even if they are present, the survey or census needs to be designed to collect data on them and also is reliant on households containing homeless people choosing to respond.

There is some evidence that people living rough hide for safety reasons, that the population will change from night to night, as people come and go and as people who found shelter one night, cannot do so on the next night. Here the methodological challenges might feel quite different, but the problem is essentially the same, the population being enumerated is mobile, fluid in composition and difficult to find. Danish practice has been to combine administrative data from services with a survey, using a mixed method approach, but elsewhere, the use of street counts remains widespread (Baptista *et al.*, 2012).

Political and Ethical Dimensions

Measurement of homelessness does not just present challenges in definition and enumeration. The act of collecting data on the extent of homelessness is a political one, because a government acknowledges homelessness as a social problem and, by extension, takes on some responsibility for that social problem by generating statistics about it. Lobbying a state to do more about homelessness, or to acknowledge the problem to begin with, also often involves generating numbers. Although voluntary sector, faith-based and charitable groups focused on reducing homelessness are unlikely to ever find the resources for a representative sample survey and have to rely on administrative data and/or estimates.

Wider definitions of homelessness, which include all homelessness, also influence debates about the nature and extent of the social problem. Broadly speaking, wider definitions find greater evidence of directly economic causation, i.e. homelessness generated by inequality, and, depending on the context, can indicate that the homeless population with high and complex needs, including addiction, severe mental illness and repeated contacts with criminal justice systems, represents only a *minority* among homeless people (Culhane, 2018). This represents a potential challenge to mainstream narratives about homelessness on the political right, because rather than the story of homelessness being individual, i.e. associated with mental illness, addiction or criminal behaviour, potential associations with housing and labour market failures, alongside deficits in social protection and public health systems can become much more apparent.

The ethical dimensions centre around the ways in which ‘home’ is defined and how homelessness, alongside housing exclusion more generally, is categorised in relation to that definition. The key issue here is that having a home is not just seen in physical-legal terms, but is bundled together with a lot of expectations about how someone should live and behave in society. In essence, the definition of ‘home’ being used to classify someone as homeless may out of sync with who that person is, what they may want and how they define the idea of home.

Political dimensions

The first aspect of the political dimensions of homelessness centres on what broader definitions do to the numbers. In England, around 5 000 people sleep rough at any one point, almost certainly an undercount, as street counts miss people who hide, squat, are not bedded down or not within the areas being covered (MHCLG, 2019). To put that in context, England’s population is around 56 million (UK population is around 66 million), i.e. around 0.0008% of the people living in England are living rough at any point, according to these statistics[3]. Using a broader definition, including homeless households in temporary accommodation and people in emergency shelters and homelessness services, scales that up to an estimated 280 000 people in England, i.e. around one person in 200 is homeless at any point (Shelter, 2019). That figure excludes anyone staying with family members, friends or acquaintances or living in squats, or other insecure accommodation. Data are

3 In 2020, it became apparent that this was an undercount, when the ‘everyone in’ scheme placed all rough sleepers in England in hotels and temporary accommodation in response to the outbreak of COVID 19 in the Spring, the number was closer on 15 000 (i.e. 0.027% of population).

simply lacking here, which means generating even a broadly representative estimate is not possible. However, the limited information that there is suggests that accurate data on people in these situations might add tens of thousands of people to the homeless total for England (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2019). The broader the definition, the bigger the social problem, counting all homelessness produces jumps in numbers that are in orders of magnitude, from next to nothing to the equivalent of the population of a city.

Finland shows this effect from another angle. From an external perspective, while Finland's efforts to pursue a functional, then actual, state of 'homelessness zero' continue apace, this is a country with almost no homelessness: 4600 lone adults and 264 homeless families and couples, in a country of 5.5 million people as at the 2019 national count (ARA, 2020). Looking at those figures more closely shows something else, 68% of the 4600 lone homeless adults were living 'temporarily with friends or relatives' (ARA, 2020). As noted, Finland's use of a definition includes some elements of homelessness among housed people, which if it were not being counted as homelessness, would reduce numbers to residual levels. However, Finland's national statistics are a mix of local authority administrative data and estimates, so that while they provide at least some sense of scale, the Finnish counts do not provide a roadmap for wider, comparative analysis of all homelessness in Europe.

Again, in several European countries, as in the USA, homelessness is largely defined and counted on the basis that it only encompasses people living rough and/or in emergency shelter (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; HUD, 2019). A lot of medical research also uses only a living rough/emergency shelter definition (Van Straaten *et al.*, 2015; Fransham and Dorling, 2018; Lewer *et al.*, 2019; Perera and Agboola, 2019). These counts and analyses are not necessarily constructed in opposition to a wider definition of homelessness. Rather it is a reflection of popular narratives about homelessness as only meaning people living on the streets, who are there because of 'sin' (addiction) and 'sickness' (severe mental illness); popular images of homelessness influence how it is defined and measured and those images do necessarily not reflect realities like the presence of family homelessness (Gowan, 2010; Buck *et al.*, 2004; Hodgetts *et al.*, 2006).

A broad definition of homelessness challenges mainstream narratives about the nature of society, disrupting 'capitalist realist' imagery (Fisher, 2009; Krugman, 2020). Wider definitions of homelessness tend to incorporate populations who tend *not* to have high and complex needs, such as severe mental illness, nor to exhibit behaviours that include criminality and addiction, and whose main characteristic is poverty (Burt, 2001; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). If homelessness is not just about individual pathology (Fopp, 2009), but may sometimes have purely structural causes (Marcuse, 1988), that raises some very uncomfortable questions about the nature of society.

For example, if homelessness narratives are focused on the 5000 people living rough in England, whose situations can be explained using stories of individual action and inaction (sin) and complex needs (sickness) that have 'disconnected' them from society, homelessness can be presented as a tiny, indeed residual, social problem (Anderson, 1993; Gowan, 2010). The narrative around homelessness in England becomes *very* different if there is the equivalent of an entire city, including tens of thousands of children, experiencing homelessness, some of whom have high and complex needs, but *most* of whom are simply poor (Shelter, 2019). When homelessness often does not come from addiction or mental illness, but from a mix of insufficient income and bad luck (O'Flaherty, 2010), maintaining narratives that it is all about 'sin' and 'sickness' becomes difficult.

If homelessness includes working people experiencing extremes effects of after housing cost poverty and includes families, usually headed by women, where homelessness was triggered by domestic violence and poverty (Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012; Baptista *et al.*, 2017), more and more of the homeless population has no experience of mental illness, addiction or crime. Once the definition shifts beyond people living rough and/or in emergency accommodation, women also appear in greater numbers. Counting homelessness that is not confined to the streets and shelters raises serious questions about the longstanding assumption that lone women are very much less likely to be homeless than men (Pleace, 2016; Bretherton, 2017).

Marquardt (2016) uses the example of Germany to explore these tensions around the collection and coverage of homelessness statistics. While policy has since shifted, she argues that the German State resisted enumeration because it did not want to clearly visualise homelessness and then be compelled to do something about it. Taking this line, homelessness statistics in general, and the recognition of wider homelessness within those statistics can become a policy 'weapon'. To return to the earlier example, if homelessness is defined as including relatively large numbers of highly economically marginalised people, staying with friends and relatives because they have nowhere else to go, who lack the 'expected' characteristics, i.e. they are not lone men, do not have high prevalence of addiction, mental or physical illness, but are instead characterised primarily by poverty, homelessness starts to look and feel *very* different. Collecting statistics on this population changes, as Marquart argues, how we visualise homelessness, i.e. homelessness starts to look like some causation is down to macro-economic effects, not individual 'sin' (addiction) or 'sickness' (mental illness) (Gowan, 2010). Redefining and then counting populations whose position in homelessness cannot be 'explained' in terms of high individual prevalence of crime, addiction and severe mental illness, brings both benefits to those populations and additional costs to the State.

There is also an incentive, from this perspective, for governments and other interested parties to pronounce certain elements within the homeless population, such as large groups experiencing homelessness for largely socioeconomic reasons, as 'difficult' or 'impossible' to count (Marquardt, 2016). Mostowska (2020) makes comparable points about homelessness statistics sometimes having a clear political function, arguing that Polish data collection is focused on homeless populations that fit within a 'sin/sickness', or individual pathology, narrative, in marked contrast to Scandinavian data collection using much broader definitions, including forms of homelessness experienced within housing. Mostowska shows how homelessness statistics in Poland and Scandinavia reflect and reinforce the images of homelessness on which policy is based; in Poland, data are collected that only really allow for an image/definition of homelessness as an issue of individual pathology.

Ethical dimensions

Marquardt (2016a) argues that the assumptive baggage attached to mainstream images of 'home' means that homeless people have tended to be classified as 'insufficient dwellers'. This creates homeless service frameworks that problematise poverty, exclusion and vulnerability in therapeutic (individual), rather than structural, terms. Housing First was designed to change the dynamic within some American homelessness services, replacing systems that tried to modify someone's behaviour so they fitted into a strictly defined image of a 'housing ready' individual. However, it has also been pointed out that the goal of the original form of Housing First could be seen as same as the American linear residential treatment services that it sought to replace, a 'normal' life in a 'normal' home in a 'normal' community (Willse, 2010; Hansen Löfstrand and Juhila, 2012). The narratives for very different types of homelessness service are consistent, in the sense of always being about how a homeless individual "needs to change" and the best ways to facilitate that change.

There is a clear distinction between, for example, the minimum physical and legal standards set out in the OHCHR and UN Habitat *Right to Adequate Housing* (OHCHR and UN Habitat, 2009) and the emotional, cultural and personal idea of 'home'. Veness (1993, p.319) notes:

… definitions of home are comprised of an assortment of environmental and emotional components, which of the specific components of home are deemed essential depends on prevailing cultural ideals, social relations and individual needs.

Not only is an idea of ‘home’ something that is personal, it is also the case that something with the required physical-legal elements of ‘home’ might also be a surveillant, oppressive and physically dangerous place (Veness, 1993). ‘Home’ has clear physical-legal components in European countries, but a ton of cultural and ideological assumptions about what is meant by ‘home’, which are not necessarily spelled out, also tend come along for the ride (Marquardt, 2016a).

It has been argued that homelessness research has eaten itself, becoming cut off from wider academic debates on the power dynamics of social research and on responsible innovation in social research (Lancione, 2016). There is evidence of a broad tendency to define homelessness as someone being outside a narrowly defined range of accommodation with certain physical-legal characteristics, which include safety and privacy, but without further consideration of the human dimensions of what constitutes a ‘home’. There is no direct allowance for the psychological and emotional dimensions of homelessness, nor the precarity of an experience that can take the form of near-constant *mobility*, that is reported in research (Reeve, 2011; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012). In essence, definitions of homelessness have been created without reference to people with lived experience.

Homelessness research has explored the idea that home is about identity and that homelessness is social, symbolic and cultural, as well as being a physical-legal, state (Moore, 2007). Work on the gender dynamics of homelessness, particularly women’s experience, is important here (Austerberry *et al.*, 1984). Qualitative research on the lived experience of homeless women has provided insights that should be helping reshape debates about what is meant by homelessness (Bennett, 2011; Bretherton, 2017; Bretherton, 2020). McCarthy (2017, p.961) notes:

… the ‘home to homelessness continuum’ still proves inadequate as a means of conceptualising complexity. A linear continuum does not suffice when women hold a multitude of shifting meanings of both home and homelessness.

‘Home’ suggests a safe, secure environment, protected from environmental and human risks, where one is dry, safe, warm and not at risk of attack. Work on the gender dynamics of homelessness draws attention to the disconnect that can and does exist between this imagery and lived experience, as housing can be the site of exploitation, abuse, repression and violence, an *unsafe* environment.

Security in a legal sense is often qualified too, protections vary for people who are renting from a private or social landlord and are much stronger in some European countries than others, but there is no absolute safety from eviction (Kenna *et al.*, 2016). Even outright ownership of housing, which brings the highest security, ultimately does not make housing unassailable, for example if an owned family home is in the way of some serious infrastructure, like a major road or a runway.

There is also the literature exploring homemaking among people who are usually defined as homeless. A key argument here centres on the idea of dwelling as difference, on homeless people – unable to access mainstream forms of dwelling – building their own, *alternative* versions of home. This is sometimes in the form of physical structures, like encampments, or adaptations of spaces not designed as dwellings (Herring, 2014; Lancione, 2019). It is also as an internal, emotional process, people finding ways to create their own versions of 'domestic' space in homelessness services, or when living on the street (Moore, 2007; Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009).

Alternative ways of living, homemaking while being defined as homeless, can be viewed as a form of resistance, building one's own home/domestic space in response to a society that will not let you live as most citizens do (Lancione, 2019). Governments, including liberal democracies, do not like itinerant populations that are not connected to the socioeconomic mainstream. Putting it crudely, if someone pitches a tent in a field, pursuing homemaking choices that are not reflective of the norms of what constitutes a home, the chances that they will simply be left alone are slim. Some countries police homelessness encampments/unregulated dwellings by allowing them in certain areas, on at least a semi-permanent basis, but keeping them out of sight and contact with mainstream society (Herring, 2014). Nevertheless, free markets, taxation, indeed the very existence of the State depends on populations behaving in very set ways, which means 'vagrants' have always been a population who are to be contained and, to varying degrees, integrated (Ruddick, 1990; Humphreys, 1999; Speer, 2016; Lancione, 2019).

The potential risks in this work are assumptive, i.e. that research will start with and stick to an assumption that homeless people are different and choose to be different, risking misconstruing survival tactics as resistance and expediency as an evidence of wanting to pursue an alternative lifestyle. Some homeless people may indeed want a life of glorious uncertainty (Deacon *et al.*, 1995), but projecting differing cultural norms, choices and characteristics onto homeless populations can be just another form of individual pathology. Some research has been criticised as telling homeless people who they are and for having a predetermined subtext about what is 'wrong' with them, which is around assumptions that homeless people have some innate tendency to want to live differently to everyone else (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Jolley, 2020).

The ethical questions around defining and counting homelessness centre on two issues. The first centres on the level of confidence that any data collection genuinely records and represents lived experience of homelessness, given that there are emotional and psychological elements in how a home is defined. The second centres on control and representation, with Housing First we have (arguably) taken the first steps towards a response to homelessness that is centred on the human being experiencing it, that is built around responding to their expressed opinions and that respects their experiences. Homelessness, defined and counted in the wrong way, risks imposing a reductionist, potentially stigmatising categorisation on people who, if they feel it does not represent them or their experiences, often lack the resources to resist such a definition (Jolley, 2020).

This links to wider social scientific debates. People experiencing homelessness are classified by researchers, by policymakers and by providers of homelessness services, and generally cannot politically mobilise in an orthodox sense and directly represent themselves. The idea of describing someone as a 'rough sleeper', as compared to someone who is 'hidden homeless', does not originate from people experiencing different dimensions of homelessness. People experiencing homelessness, who may see themselves in a variety of very different ways, can have labels placed on them by researchers and often exercise little or no control over how they are defined and counted. There are risks of homelessness becoming enacted in performative acts of social scientific research, which, rather than mapping realities, are led by research processes built and run by academics, rather than being based on dialogue with people experiencing homelessness (Law and Urry, 2004). In essence, the enumeration of homelessness, if done in the wrong ways, risks building an unrepresentative set of images that are disconnected from how people experiencing homelessness see themselves and their situation.

Measuring Homelessness

There are two practical challenges. First, agreeing a working definition of homelessness that can be used on an comparative basis across Europe and, second, building systems that allow for robust enumeration, or at least estimation and projection with a good degree of confidence. Homelessness is not something that governments necessarily wish to record comprehensively, both because of how this can inflate the numbers, and if a government does not wish to generate data that raise questions about dysfunction in housing and labour markets, as well as social protection, housing and public health policies. There are also methodological challenges defining 'home' in a largely physical-legal sense, without the emotional and psychological dimension, raises questions about the efficacy of data collection and there are ethical questions about whether someone should be categorised, or tagged, as 'homeless' by research, or administrative processes, over which they cannot exercise any control.

The challenges centre on building a representative, accurate and comprehensive definition that is also practical for use and, with that in place, to build better systems for enumerating homelessness. It is not useful to enter into an endless and unresolvable debate about the Foucauldian biopolitics of homelessness measurement, nor, by contrast, should any effort be focused on entirely mechanistic spatial-legal definitions of homelessness, because that approach has inherent and serious limits. Alongside this, there is the question of what is actually practical in terms of methodological development, balancing what can be achieved, with a reasonable degree of confidence and robustness, while also arriving at an approach that is practical for use across Europe.

Towards a definition

ETHOS has informed attempts to conceptualise and measure homelessness at global level (Busch Geertsema *et al.*, 2016). A proposed global framework identifies three groups of homeless people, those without accommodation (living rough and in shelters or homelessness services), those living in living in temporary or crisis accommodation and those living in severely inadequate and/or insecure accommodation, including the following groups:

- People sharing with friends and relatives on a temporary basis
- People living under threat of violence
- People living in cheap hotels, bed and breakfasts and similar
- People squatting in conventional housing
- People living in conventional housing that is unfit for human habitation
- People living in trailers, caravans and tents
- People living in extremely overcrowded conditions
- People living in non-conventional buildings and temporary structures, including those living in slums/informal settlements

Modification of ETHOS, along these sorts of lines, synchronising the definitions of homelessness with those used elsewhere, would seem to be a logical way forward (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2016). Amore, whose criticisms of ETHOS have been influential (Amore *et al.*, 2011; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013) has argued that an alternative approach is to establish a baseline for severe housing deprivation, along the same lines as globally agreed measures of absolute and relative poverty (Amore, 2019).

Amore's arguments reflect existing global standards in the *Right to Adequate Housing* (OHCHR and UN Habitat, 2009) which includes access to essential utilities and minimum physical standards, alongside security of tenure. Global definitions of adequate housing include *accessibility* i.e. is housing suitable for habitation if someone has a limiting illness or a disability and *affordability*, i.e. is after housing cost poverty at a level where a home ceases to be sustainable (OHCHR and UN

Habitat, 2009). Another element centres on *location*, which raises another potential dimension of homelessness, a home is not sustainable not because of physical, social, environmental or legal issues around the dwelling itself, rather it is unsustainable because of where it is (OHCHR and UN Habitat, 2009). The idea that an *area* can be detrimental to health, wellbeing and life chances, is also at the core of urban and public health policy across Europe. Spatial concentrations of poverty are viewed as actively generating low social cohesion, poor health and wellbeing and poor life chances (Atkinson and Jacobs, 2010).

Breaking this down a little, a series of what might be termed *threshold challenges* emerge. These threshold challenges centre on drawing distinction between a state of homelessness, as distinct from the much more widespread state of workless and in-work poverty and exclusion, often, though importantly not always, accompanied by bad housing, that is experienced by tens of millions of people in Europe (Toro *et al.*, 1995; Piketty, 2015; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2017).

Beyond this, there is again the question of differing cultural and legal definitions of what constitutes *uninhabitable* housing across Europe. This is not a question of absolutes, dozens of people sharing housing that is designed to house four or five people, lack of working plumbing, electricity supply and a roof that is not weather proof are, at least nominally, unacceptable everywhere. However, interpretations as to whether a given situation is housing exclusion or a state of homelessness vary and will continue to do so. For example, around 15.7 per cent of the (then) EU-28 population lived in an (Eurostat defined) overcrowded household in 2017. The overcrowding rates for Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania were all above 40 per cent, but the reasons were not simply about affordable housing supply or GDP, they also reflected differing social norms (Eurostat, 2019). It is not possible, for example, to just apply North Western EU standards about 'overcrowding' or 'unfit' housing as the benchmark for the South and East of Europe.

Another threshold challenge centres on the point at which forthcoming eviction should be regarded as a state of 'homelessness'. Wales and then England decided that the former practice of defining someone threatened with eviction within 28 days, with nowhere else to go as homelessness was insufficient for effective prevention and upped the time before eviction to up to 56 days (Mackie *et al.*, 2017). In other contexts, however, homeless would be regarded as starting at the point of physical eviction and not before. There are also questions around whether a given level of after housing cost poverty, placing an individual, couple or family in a financial situation they cannot sustain, should also be seen as representing a state of (imminent) homelessness.

Homelessness might also be regarded as referring to someone with a limiting illness or disability living in housing that actively disables, rather than enables them, because its design and lack of suitable adaptation actively impairs their control over their own life. Area effects are last on this list, the question again being, at what point, if at any point, does a neighbourhood reach the point of being so risky to wellbeing, be it in terms of crime levels, lack of economic opportunities or breathable air and drinkable water, that the people living in it should be regarded as homeless.

Adding to this complexity are the arguments that home and hence homelessness can only be properly understood as an emotional and psychological state, not simply in physical-legal terms. On top of that, there are the surveillant and politically driven distortions that accompany the ways in which homelessness is sometimes defined, imposing categorisations on people who have little or no say as to whether or not they are within a certain group.

There is, to borrow from American terminology, a need to descope this, revising down objectives and expectations so that a workable solution can be arrived at, feasible with the available resources. The most logical course is aim for ETHOS 2.0, with an emphasis on practicality, simplifying, clarifying and streamlining, rather than increasing complexity.

Risks exist in reducing homelessness to simple, but broad, categories, such as people living in severely inadequate (including unsafe situations where someone is facing violence or abuse) and/or insecure accommodation. This is because we are instantly back with the arguments about what 'inadequate' and 'insecure' mean in different cultures and countries, and, again, the emotional, psychological and surveillant dimensions of defining and measuring homelessness are not in the picture.

A workable definition of overcrowding as being a form of homelessness cannot be about crossing narrowly defined margins, homelessness is a unique form of social distress and is *distinct* from poverty and housing exclusion. Here, US experience might be useful, particularly the definition of 'doubling up' among poorly housed families, i.e. two families living in a dwelling designed for one (Bush and Shinn, 2017). A working definition, again emphasising *homelessness* as representing a unique form of social distress, might be anyone living in housing at 200 per cent of designed occupancy or above. This is arbitrary, as it is quite legitimate to ask why not 150 per cent or 120 per cent, but 200 per cent occupancy represents extreme overcrowding and homelessness, if it is something distinct from housing need, is distinguished by being an *extreme* state.

The concept of medical priority for rehousing, used by social landlords across Europe, i.e. providing better housing to someone whose health and wellbeing is being undermined by their current housing (or lack thereof) (Pleace *et al.*, 2011;

Bretherton *et al.*, 2013) is also potentially useful. There are also validated statistical measures that assess the impact of housing and neighbourhood on mental and physical health (Pleace with Wallace, 2011). Developmental work, with health scientists, is required, but beyond the essential requirement for homelessness to encompass women and children (and sometimes men) at risk of domestic violence and abuse, housing that is actively disabling and/or injurious to health and wellbeing, including association with significant emotional and psychological distress, also needs to be included in a definition of homelessness.

A situation of homelessness in terms of physical adequacy and legal security can be based on ETHOS and its conceptualisation of the spatial, social and legal domains that constitute homelessness. Those elements in ETHOS that are contradictory, or entirely out of step with mainstream definitions and understanding of homelessness, can be relatively easily ironed out (Amore *et al.*, 2011; Pleace and Bretherton, 2013). Arriving at minimum physical standards that are generally applicable across Europe represents a challenge, but perhaps the best solution here is to follow Amore's (2019) suggested direction and just look instead to using minimum global standards (OHCHR and UN Habitat, 2009) as the reference points.

Precarity is complex to define, because security of tenure is rarely absolute, even owning both the housing and the land it is built upon is not necessarily a situation of total security, not if the property is in an urban regeneration zone, or in the way of a new runway, motorway or high speed train line. In some European countries living in the private rented sector is simply *inherently* insecure. However, moving back to the point that homelessness represents an extreme, a unique form of distress, defining housing precarity that represents actual homelessness could be defined as encompassing people without any legal rights to occupy either the land and/or building they are living in, or who are in the *process* of being evicted, without any other housing option being available to them.

Safety is another dimension. Safety from abuse, repression and violence within housing that removes what should be the safety of home, someone cannot have a 'home' in which they are unsafe or being subject to abuse. Safety might also be taken as extending to not living in an unsafe environment, both in the sense of physical risks from crime, but also in areas without green space, where environments are degraded and represent potential risks to mental and physical health.

Spelling this out, all homelessness can be defined as:

- The points raised by research about how definitions can express, and potentially help weaponise, surveillant and stigmatising images of homelessness are difficult to ignore. Any revised definition of homelessness has to be tested and, crucially, *agreed with* representatives of the people it is being applied to. This should be the first stage in developing and testing a pan-EU definition of homelessness. Coproductive research and policy, as Housing First has shown, is the best way to reduce and prevent homelessness and, if we recognise that home and homelessness are emotional and psychological, rather than simply legal and physical constructs, talking to people with these experiences is the first step in building accurate systems of measurement.

- Incorporating existing and new definitions within a modified form of ETHOS. It is important that exclusion from the physical and social domains is recognised as constituting a state of homelessness, so that living (unwillingly) with family, friends and acquaintances, because there is no other housing option, constitutes homelessness. Incompatibilities with all other mainstream definitions of homelessness, i.e. around asylum seekers and people living in institutional settings, also need to be modified.
- A new ETHOS 'domain' centred on health and wellbeing is required. Housing or accommodation that is actively disabling for an individual and/or actively undermines mental and physical health, including associations with significant emotional/psychological distress, constitutes homelessness. Someone in a home that is the site for domestic abuse and/or violence is homeless. People living in housing situated in areas that are highly environmentally and socially degraded, where health and wellbeing are being threatened as a consequence, are also homeless.
- Overcrowding at 200 per cent or above designed capacity for a dwelling constitutes homelessness. Physical standards below those specified by OHCHR and UN Habitat also constitute a state of homelessness. Precarity, i.e. insecure accommodation that constitutes a state of homelessness encompasses people without any legal rights to occupy the land/building where they are living and those actively being evicted from housing, with no other housing option available.

The term 'hidden homelessness' needs to be made redundant. There is no consensus about what 'hidden homelessness' is, but the inherently vagueness is less of a problem than a term that suggests that there are different 'levels' of homelessness, some of which are less serious than others. Rough sleeping might be the extreme, but all homelessness is *very* destructive for every human being who experiences it and for the European societies in which it occurs. There are risks in using definitions that might be misread, or deliberately employed, as indicating two levels of homelessness, i.e. 'real' homelessness that is people living rough and in emergency shelters and, be it implicitly or explicitly presented as such, the less serious form of 'hidden' homelessness. The political right has successfully deployed a tactic of equating homelessness with rough sleeping for decades, setting and shrinking the narrative to successfully hide the true scale and socially destructive effects of what is often a much more widespread social problem (Anderson, 1993; Cloke *et al.*, 2001).

Towards Measurement

The best solution would be to implement a mix of dedicated sample surveys while adding questions to existing population level surveys, combined with making census data collection sensitive to experience of homelessness. Dedicated, socially scientifically robust research could also provide the means to model and project the extent of homelessness across populations, as well inform restructuring of large scale administrative datasets to record homelessness. With the right set of indicators, the still nascent, but ever increasing capacity of big data, artificial intelligence and machine learning systems might be exploited (Culhane, 2016) to get a statistically robust picture of total homelessness. A robust sample survey could be used to project the actual scale of homelessness at national level and at pan-EU level. The main methodological innovation that is required is to start asking the right questions, as widely as possible, using existing technologies and methodologies that already allow tracking of social problems like health inequalities with a fair degree of precision.

The question remains about how best to record the extent and needs of homeless populations who live off grid, i.e. likely to be missed by sample surveys, census data collection and by administrative systems because they do not use social protection, public health or homelessness services very often, or for long periods. The first point here is that the bulk of homeless populations are generally in services or at least have some contact with them, because actually, literally, surviving on the street on a sustained or recurrent basis without any external help at all is *extremely* difficult (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009; Lancione, 2019). In addition, both US and, particularly, Danish experience, shows that with the right combination of methodological tools and resources, it is possible to find a lot of homelessness via homelessness services (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015).

The use of capture-recapture as an effective technique to find those elements of the homeless population who are off-grid has long been debated (Fisher *et al.,* 1994). Beyond the somewhat queasy feeling induced by talking about counting human beings in, exactly, the same way as estimating the antelope population of a particular bit of African savanna, there are a couple of practical limitations. First, discussion of these methods is firmly grounded in a definition of homelessness that is confined to people sleeping rough, not even necessarily encompassing people in emergency shelters and certainly not those living with friends, acquaintances or relatives because they cannot access their own housing. There are arguments that capture/recapture has potentially more effectiveness than street counts, with all their many limits around people hiding, lots of buildings and most of any city where the count takes place not being covered and generally only being conducted over short periods. However, these techniques are nevertheless generally posited on the idea – and can only really work properly – on the basis that homelessness exists in one narrow, street using, form and through using a series of repeated street counts that cross compare results and a more reliable, usually larger, estimate of people sleeping rough can be arrived at (Coumans *et al.*, 2017).

The most effective methodology will involve a dedicated analysis, ideally at pan-EU level and from one author's perspective, also involving the UK, that is based on a working definition of homelessness that closely reflects the views, opinions of people with lived experience of homelessness, who are participants in co-productive research rather than research subjects. The nature of the population, the sample universe for homelessness needs to be established, as existing data in most European countries provide only limited insight into what the scale and nature of all experiences of homelessness is.

Counting all homelessness means dedicated, properly resourced research, aimed at encompassing and representing homelessness as a whole, ideally comparative so that the results are generalisable across European countries that differ radically in areas like social protection, public health and social housing, alongside GDP. Beyond this, building indicators and measures of homelessness into mainstream administrative systems, across social protection, public health, social housing and criminal justice, a process that first needs to be properly informed by robust, primary research, is essential. Population surveys designed for other purposes and the collection of census data should, where relevant, also include validated measures on experiences of homelessness.

Over the last 40 years, there has not been enough effort, particularly not enough robust social scientific enquiry, into clearly defining the nature and extent of homelessness at the level of individual countries, nor across Europe as a whole. One challenge centres on where the line between housed and homeless lies. There are difficulties, indeed some quite complex ideas, about how home is an emotional, social construct, which mean homelessness cannot be reduced to one kind of structure instead of another kind, or whether or not someone is living outside; yet these methodological challenges are not insurmountable.

It is arguable that the human sense of what is meant by 'home', as somewhere physically safe, legally secure and reasonably comfortable to live in, has a universal core, albeit that there are important cultural differences about the idea of home. Imposing definitions of 'home' and thus definitions of 'homeless' on people who may or may not see themselves in those terms has never been helpful. As a starting point, it is necessary to talk to the populations we define as homeless and those experiencing what we define as experiencing other forms of housing exclusion, about what they feel, think and experience. Defining what is homelessness in that way, through human experience, is the first step in recording the human dimensions of this social problem, which in turn will help build an analytical framework through which it will be possible to determine what is, and what is not, homelessness in Europe.

The other challenges are logistical. Mapping a population that is off-grid, in the sense of not being consistently (or sometimes at all) present on administrative systems, that has members who move around unpredictably and sometimes frequently and that is fluid in composition is difficult. Nevertheless we have the example of the Danish systems, combining administrative and survey data, which provide probably the most comprehensive systems for homelessness enumeration on Earth (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014), and while not perfect, as no system can be, Danish experiences shows what can be done. There is a distinction between impossibility and artificial limits to methodological rigour imposed by resource constraints. While counting numbers at any point, tracking change over time and finding hard to reach populations for enumeration of all homelessness is *difficult*, it is possible to get a lot closer to a full picture of all homelessness in Europe, if sufficient resources were combined with the right research design.

The humanitarian case for having a better understanding of the true scale, nature and distribution of European homelessness has been clear for decades. All homelessness, the experience of living in overcrowded spaces, experiencing unwanted sharing and not having the physical and emotional security of a settled home, now represents an even greater risk to wellbeing because of the pandemic (Culhane *et al.*, 2020). There has never been a greater imperative to secure a better knowledge of homelessness, how it is experienced and where it is, as through that understanding, the scope to maximise prevention and reducing levels, using innovations like the Finnish integrated strategy, can be greatly enhanced.

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The Principles of an Ideal Homelessness Administrative Data System: Lessons from Global Practice

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Abstract_ *Discussions of homelessness measurement methodologies have largely focused on the generation of primary data, for example point-in-time counts. Though there is long standing tradition in the use of administrative data for measuring homelessness, relatively little examination of administrative data as method exists, i.e. the set of socio-technical practices through which administrative data are generated. This paper undertakes an internationally informed review of 50 administrative data systems in order to deconstruct these systems and stage a methodological discussion. Uniquely, the review included systems from other policy fields outside of homelessness, including health and education, in order to learn from wider data practices. The discussion elaborates on six key design considerations driving administrative data systems, including; function; data architecture; data quality; ethico-legal considerations; privacy preservation; and data access and accessibility. To conclude, we outline what an ideal data system would look like in order to improve the potential use of administrative data to measure homelessness and our response to it, but, more importantly, in mobilising data more effectively in order to facilitate research and operational uses of data. The six design elements can inform future homelessness administrative data systems, whilst also sensitising researchers and users of current administrative data to its (socially) constructed nature.*

Keywords_ *Administrative data, homelessness, system design, international, measurement*

Introduction

Policy makers, practitioners, and researchers across the globe have been highly critical of the current state of homelessness data, with concerns largely focused on the quality or lack of data to enable consistent and comparative measurement of the issue (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2016). Whilst the methodological focus of homelessness measurement has been on point-in-time counts, and to a lesser extent the use of capture-recapture (Cowan *et al.*, 1988; Williams, 2005), there has been an enduring interest in the use of administrative data for homelessness policy and research (Culhane and Metreaux, 1997; Culhane, 2016). Administrative data—also known as records or registers—are data routinely generated by organisations and can be considered the 'data exhaust' from operational purposes (Hand, 2018). Examples of administrative data include records of stays in shelters, or intake screening when entering a homelessness system.

The general issues with administrative data for research and statistics are widely rehearsed, for example poor data quality and the difficulties of using data generated for other (non-measurement) purposes (Connelly *et al*., 2016; Hand, 2018), as are their specific application to homelessness (Edgar *et al*., 2007; Culhane, 2016; Metraux and Tseng, 2017). In contrast to the growing body of critical literature on administrative data as a data source, the aim of this paper is to discuss administrative data as 'method', i.e. a set of socio-technical practices through which administrative data are generated and deployed. The starting point for this paper is therefore how to design a new homelessness administrative data system, rather than assess the virtues and pitfalls of administrative data for measurement more generally. The paper begins with an overview of the evidence base underpinning our discussion, before moving on to examine several core design considerations of administrative data systems that emerged from our review. The paper concludes by proposing the principles of an 'ideal' homelessness data system.

International Systems Review

The evidence base for this paper comes from a desk-based review and synthesis of 50 international administrative data systems from 9 countries (Table 1). Relevant systems were initially identified by drawing on the knowledge of homelessness sector stakeholders, with systems being included for review if they involved the gathering and/or the transmission of personal sensitive data. This initial list was then augmented and validated by identifying peer reviewed journals and 'grey literature' relating to empirical analysis of homelessness administrative data. Published analyses were identified by searching Cardiff University's digital library using a set of key terms related to administrative data[1]. Data sources used in these publications were then identified and the systems that generated them added to the review. Primary literature relating to administrative data systems were located from relevant online sources, e.g. user guides and manuals made available on government or software provider websites. These primary materials were supplemented with secondary accounts of data systems, e.g. in empirical research and statistical publications.

The systems included in the review primarily covered homelessness data. However, data systems from other policy areas were also included in order to learn from wider best practice. For example, health care settings tend to have well developed data systems due to the routine production of administrative data, such as medical notes and medical test results. As this paper aims to discuss an ideal data system, it was appropriate to think outside the current data practices across the homeless sector, which can lead to incomplete pictures of homelessness at local and national levels (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2016).

1 Key terms used in literature search included: administrative data, administrative records, data linkage, linked data, record linkage, linked record.

Table 1. Homelessness and non-homelessness administrative data systems which inform the review, split by country

Country	Administrative data systems
United Kingdom	– Supporting People, Wales – Street Homeless Information Network (SHIN) pilot – SSDA903 collection/Looked after children Census** – Housing Stock Analytical Resource for Wales, UK Secure eResearch Platform** – Mainstay – Greater Manchester Tackling Homelessness Information NetworK (GM-Think/M-Think) – In-Form DataLab – HMRC DataLab** – Ministry of Justice DataLab** – Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) – Supporting People Client Record System and Outcomes Framework – Scottish statutory homelessness collections – Homelessness Case Level Information Collection & DELTA – Expanded Troubled Families programme** – Dementias Platform UK Data Portal** – Kent Integrated Dataset** – Connecting Care** – COntinuous REcording of lettings and sales (CORE) ** – NHS Scotland Corporate Data Warehouse & Data Marts** – North West London Whole Systems Integrated Care (WSIC) data warehouse and dashboards** – GP Connect** – Care.data – Secure Anonymised Information Linkage databank**
Ireland	– Pathway Accommodation & Support System
Denmark	– Register of users of section 110 accommodation in Denmark
Poland	– Homelessness and housing exclusion (BIWM) Data Standard
Estonia	– X-tee e-Estonia**
Australia	– Specialist Homelessness Services National Minimum Data Set & Validata – Specialist Homelessness Information Platform – e-Wellbeing platform (Part of the Geelong Project)
New Zealand	– Integrated Data Infrastructure** – Individual Client-Level Data**

United States	– Department of Housing and Urban Development homelessness data collections (National) – New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care Homeless Management Information System (New York) – Chicago Homeless Management Information System (Chicago) – Online Navigation and Entry System (San Francisco) – Clarity – Nevada Statewide Community and Homeless Management Information System (Nevada) – CARES of NY Regional Homeless Management Information System (New York State) – Ohio Human Services Data Warehouse (Ohio State) – Michigan's Statewide Homeless Assistance Data online Warehouse (SHADoW) – Veterans Health Administration Corporate Data Warehouse** – Virginia Longitudinal Data System** – North Carolina School Works** – Knoxville Homeless Management Information System (KnoxHMIS) – Stella P – Kentucky Statewide Longitudinal Data System – StreetSmart
Canada	– Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (National) – Calgary Homelessness Information Management System (Calgary) – Shelter Management Information System (Toronto)

** Non-homelessness administrative data system

As each system operates within a specific context, whether that be policy, legal, or social, we avoided creating typologies of whole systems, instead choosing to deconstruct systems into a series of six crosscutting areas that emerged as important design considerations, summarised in Table 2. The desk-based analysis revealed possible options relating to each design consideration. The following sections of the paper discuss each of these six core design considerations and drawing on examples from international data systems the paper critically reflects upon options relating to each element.

Table 2: Overview of design considerations and options identified from the review of administrative-data systems

Design consideration	Definition	Approaches adopted (Options)
Function of the system	Proposed use of the data outside its original context of generation	– Measurement of homelessness, and the response to it – Research and analysis – Operational integration of data for decision making
Data architecture model	Pattern of data flows within the data system	– Centralised, bringing together data into a single dataset/system – Federated, where data remain with data owner(s) and are brought together when required – Hybrid models combining elements of centralisations and federation
Data quality	Quality of data is a normative judgement based on intended use, however data should be timely, reliable and valid given their context	– Data standardisation/harmonisation – Active monitoring of data quality – Automated validation
Ethico-legal	The ethical and legal considerations when gathering and storing data	– Consent to share and process personal/sensitive data from the person – Using legal means to share/process data, e.g. drawing on specific legislation as enablers
Privacy preservation	Mechanisms of maintaining the privacy of personal data being processed by a data system, thereby meeting certain legal and ethical obligations	– Processing (e.g. aggregation) – De-identification of individual/case level data – Sharing personal information, with higher levels of data security, e.g. Trusted Third Party and split file processes
Data access and accessibility	Accessibility relates to making data interpretable to a wide range of audiences of different 'data literacy' levels, whilst access relates to physically being able to work with the raw data	– Digested information, i.e. portals, dashboards, and open data, meta-data – Raw data, i.e. data downloads – Mediated knowledge, i.e. data labs, automated data generation

Function of the System

Whilst this special issue focuses on measuring homelessness, the review of data systems and the wider literature very clearly highlight how measurement is one of three very broad functional uses of administrative data, the other two being research and operational purposes. Kumar (2015) makes a similar distinction between research and practice orientated uses within the context of Integrated Data Systems. However, from the review, the design and functionality of systems that were designed purely for measurement, as opposed to those that actively used data for research, were markedly different—leading to us separating those two functions. Namely, as will be discussed later, the access and accessibility of data was found to be more limited in purely measurement orientated systems.

Use of data for measurement is largely aligned to homelessness prevalence estimation, service activity, and outcome monitoring, often within the context of performance monitoring to guide service delivery and development at local and national levels. As an example of measurement, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) produce a series of annual statistical outputs on the number and characteristics of homeless people in the United States (Henry *et al.*, 2018). Reports are based on de-duplicated aggregate counts of homeless people within communities receiving funding from HUD, with the aim of monitoring progress in terms of numbers of people experiencing homelessness. At a local level, the data being collected by communities that feed into this larger national system of measuring the prevalence of homelessness is used to generate outcomes measures that provide an indication of the performance of the community to work as a system of services, e.g. the proportion of people assisted who return to homelessness is measured through re-occurrence at a homelessness service. Missing from the United States' homelessness administrative data systems are measures of activity, i.e. details of actions undertaken by services, although this can be inferred from the type of organisation being funded, e.g. street outreach.

Systems of measurement often—though not necessarily always—result in the generation of standardised and rigorous data: in comparison to purely operational data that tends to be highly unstructured. The higher quality data within systems of measurement enable research and evaluation. The Register of users of section 110 accommodation in Denmark is an example of data collected for use in measuring activity, specifically placements of people in shelters under Section 110 of the Social Assistant Act, that generates standardised data that has been used for research, specifically through its linkage to other data sources (e.g. Nielson *et al.*, 2011; Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015; Benjaminsen, 2016). It should be noted however that the Danish approach to national statistics incorporates data linkage through the widespread use of national person registration numbers, and which greatly facilitates this research use: not all nations are as 'data mature' in their ability to operationalise administrative data, even when collected by governments.

A small subset of administrative data systems was designed specifically for the use of data for research. In the United States, the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) and North Carolina School Works (School Works) are both examples of 'statewide longitudinal data systems' intended to enable analysis of linked education data. The VLDS and School Works both bring together education data held by state organisations that cover the breadth of schooling, to enable learner pathways to be explored, with the aim of improving student outcomes through research. Though measurement can help guide allocation of resource and monitor current activity, research has an important role in future facing decision making, for example identifying risk factors and predictors of homelessness and what works in ending homelessness, both of which can help determine what interventions should be funded based on their efficacy and how they should be targeted.

The final function for administrative data systems we wish to draw attention to goes beyond measurement and research, and entails the direct (re-)integration of data into operational decision-making. However, that organisations use (or should use) their own data for decision-making is self-evident: the operational integration of data we wish to highlight is combining of data from multiple sources to expand institutional knowledge beyond its own boundaries in support of operational decisions. Data integration can occur as part of the measurement and research use of data, as the literature on Integrated Data Systems illustrates (Fantuzzo and Culhane, 2015); what marks out operational data integration is that data are tied to/ or directly impact 'real' people—rather than the more circuitous route through which policy-making impacts people. For example, Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) in Ireland is a shared real-time platform of homeless presentations and bed spaces across the country and is used as the basis for managing access to emergency accommodation. Similarly, the e-Wellbeing system associated with the school based 'Geelong' intervention in Australia was intended to bring together data about young people at risk of homelessness from different sector actors in order to co-ordinate school support staff and community intervention teams (Mackenzie and Thielking, 2013).

Data Architecture

The term 'data architecture' is used here to refer to the structure of a data system, specifically flows of data through the system, and can be broadly classified as either centralised or federated architecture—see Table 3 for an overview of the different architectures and their sub-types. In a centralised model, data are periodically reported, or 'pushed', to a central location, where they persist. The creation of a central data repository has the benefit of enabling historical analysis and measurement of homelessness in a timely manner, i.e. without having to engage in lengthy data collection exercises in order to answer each new query. Mechanisms for pushing data are either through the extraction of data from one system and depositing it in another, or several different organisations entering data into the same central repository in a 'live' manner.

An example of reporting data to another organisation is the Specialist Homelessness Services National Minimum Data Set in Australia, which collects information on people referred to or accessing homelessness services and is reported by homelessness services to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on a monthly basis. In the United States, the Ohio Human Services Data Warehouse is an example of data being reported into a specifically designed data infrastructure, or warehouse, using (semi-)automated updates. The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) in operation across Greater London is an example of a centralised model where several organisations have access to a shared platform where the 'front end' of the platform is partitioned into areas for each service provider, whilst the back-end links to a person's common record. In addition to improving measurement by enabling de-duplication of people to produce unique counts, shared systems can facilitate the use of data beyond measurement and research, to incorporate data into case management. Most of the systems reviewed adopted a centralised approach, though there were a limited number of systems adopting an alternative architecture: 'federated' data.

A federated data system adopts a 'pull' approach to data flows where organisational data remain distributed and are only brought together or integrated for specific uses. The most common approach to federation amongst the reviewed systems was through a hub and spoke model. Data owners (i.e. homelessness service providers) are the spokes, whilst a central 'hub' organises flows of data through/across the federation, known as the 'data broker'. Upon request, data are automatically extracted from systems by the data broker and combined to form a data set for analysis by the data requester. However, data are for single use only, i.e. for the use by the requester, and as such, data within a federated model is not stored outside of the participating organisations' systems in a permanent repository. The X-tee system in Estonia is an example of a completely automated federated system that enables 'live' querying of other agency databases—and forms the backbone of Estonia's 'e-Government'.

The decision to adopt federated models over centralised one has, in the United States at least, been driven by restrictive state laws against the sharing of personal data. An example of the federated model is the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS), which enables research access to de-identified school/pupil data without exchanging personal data or processing data outside of its original host organisation, thereby working within the confines of local legislation. Prior to leaving an education data owner's system within the VLDS federation, data are de-identified thereby rendering them linkable but effectively anonymous. All data being extracted under the same data request undergoes the same de-identification, meaning that the same individual can be linked across different data sources.

Table 3. Summary of data models with examples from the review

Model	Sub types	Examples
Centralised: Data 'pushed' to a single location to form a permanent data pool	***Data set:*** Where data are combined to form a single data set	– H-CLIC, United Kingdom – Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, Australia
	Warehouse: Where data are pooled together in a specifically designed data space	– Kent Integrated Data set, United Kingdom – Michigan's Statewide Homelessness Data online Warehouse, Untied States
	Information system: Where data can be accessed simultaneously by different organisations	– Combined Homelessness Information Network, United Kingdom – Homeless Individuals and Families Information System, Canada
Federated: Data are 'pulled' from organisation databases on demand, and are for single use only	***Live federation:*** Organisations can query one another's databases in-real-time	– X-tee, Estonia
	Data broker: Requests for data are managed by a central data broker who is authorised to extract data	– Virginia Longitudinal Data System, United States – North Carolina School Works, United States

Data Quality

By their very definition, administrative data are data that are used beyond their original context, for example records in Ireland where data collected on individuals housed in hostels and other emergency housing provision as part of the PASS system are used to produce regional and national statistics on homelessness. Homelessness administrative data are also often pooled from different service providers/organisations, whether these be different hostels or emergency accommodation providers (as in the case of PASS in Ireland), different outreach teams (as in the case of CHAIN in Greater London), or different local authorities (as with Scotland's HL1 collection). However, idiosyncrasies in personal and organisational practice can negatively affect data quality. As an example, due to time constraints, frontline staff may not enter all personal data fields when completing intake forms, thereby reducing the ability to de-duplicate people accessing services when attempting to count the number of unique homeless. Inaccuracies in data, or a lack of certain data outright, can lead to policy and decision making that either lacks any evidential basis or is misinformed by apparently reliable evidence; it could therefore be argued that data quality is a precondition of the 'ethical use' of data in decision making (World Health Organisation, 2017, p.30).

Standardisation of what data are collected and by who improves the consistency of data across organisations forming part of an administrative data system. Edgar *et al.* (2007) propose such a core standard for use across Europe to improve measurement of homelessness across and within nations. Similarly, in the United States, HUD require all funded communities to collect the same core standard as part of their local management information systems. Alternatively, data can be harmonised to make different data providers' data conform to a single data standard—after the fact. A case of the latter style of 'data harmonisation' is the Homeless and Housing Exclusion (BIWM) Data Standard in Poland (Wygnańska, 2015). The BIWM was an attempt to create a methodology for enumerating homelessness in Poland by combining data from service providers. In the process of creating the BIWM, differences between pre-existing data collection practices and the intended standard required re-alignment of both practitioners understanding and the final standard, illustrating the difficulties and compromises needed when standardising data, particularly across different organisation types, whilst still maintaining participation in such systems. Measurement and research uses of administrative data are facilitated through standardisation and harmonisation as it increases the coherence and coverage of information when data from disparate sources are pooled, for example leading to 'triangulation' of sources to arrive at more reliable estimates of homelessness—i.e. de-duplicate individuals to generate unique counts—or insight into different aspects of homelessness during a given point in time or over a period of time, i.e. the number of people who have experienced different forms of homelessness within a year or over their 'homelessness pathways' (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2013).

Data standardisation without some maintenance of data standards can lead to a slow decline in data quality over time, as working practices develop that can impact data. For example, in many of the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) covering communities in the United States, the lead organisation whose responsibility it is to maintain the HMIS often provides either reports on data quality, or the ability for data inputting organisations to generate data quality reports themselves. The provision of reports on data quality provides a feedback loop between data input and tangible outputs, thereby increasing the salience of the data entry activities of frontline service staff to those same staff, in addition to highlighting data issues prior to any reporting deadlines, providing time to correct these. Alternatively, organisations can work with data collectors directly to improve quality standards, an example being the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) in the United States, which is a not-for-profit organisation that works with education providers and states in order to improve the evidence base on education. Part of the work of the DQC is to improve data standards, along with use of administrative education data as part of the state funded longitudinal data systems (e.g. Kentucky Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems, Virginia Longitudinal Data System, North Carolina School Works).

Across all the data systems reviewed there were varying levels of automation of data quality monitoring, usually with data being validated when 'in transit'. In Australia, data being submitted to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare as part of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection are uploaded via Validata, a secure web-portal that generates reports of errors and data quality to enable data providing organisations to re-submit data after addressing these. Though these validation software can lessen certain administrative tasks around checking the completeness of data, they have less of an impact on the transformation of what some have likened to the transformation of service facing staff from care workers to information processors, with care roles increasingly requiring greater levels of data entry, which can change the nature of their interactions with people seeking assistance (Parton, 2008; Parton, 2009; De Witte *et al.*, 2016).

Ethical and Legal Issues

Though the re-use of organisational data is widely espoused internationally, at the extreme end leading to the formation of integrated data systems (e.g. New Zealand's Integrated Data Infrastructure), there are serious ethical and legal dilemmas when using data beyond their original context. Data protection laws, in most instances, determine the legal basis for the initial collection and processing of data for administrative purposes when providing services to homeless people; however, they also determine lawful onward use of administrative data. As an example, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation in the United Kingdom both stipulate lawful reasons for processing data, which include scientific research or statistical purposes, and the legal obligations to the 'data subject' required to be met in re-use. Mechanisms for addressing legal obligations around data re-use are discussed shortly. Though there has been some attempt to mount an ethical(/moral) argument *for* the re-use of data in order to reduce social harms (Jones *et al*., 2017), we firstly want to touch upon the more tangible ethical issue of data re-use: namely, the infringement of human rights to privacy and the negative consequences for those already at the margins of society when administrative data systems 'go wrong'.

In an ethnographic study of data analytics, Eubanks (2017) draws on case studies of the negative consequences of technology when applied to decision-making, for example how 'false positives', i.e. errors when integrating data, can result in people being denied or having assistance taken away. Though these errors occur infrequently, when they do occur, they can compound the marginalisation of people already at the margins of society. Systems errors can be exacerbated in cultures of data use where decision-making is deferred to algorithms, i.e. where client facing staff do not want to countermand decisions made by algorithms. Eubanks (2017) advocates that designers should consider how new technologies and data systems impact on people's self-determination and agency and poses a gut check for any new system in considering whether such technologies would be tolerated by the population writ large. Across homeless services it is almost universally espoused that data sharing and integration enables organisations to help people; however, were this type of data integration applied to everyone in society, it would likely be branded 'Orwellian' and dismissed as a breach of privacy rights.

As an example of negative public reaction from integrating data, care.data in England was intended to be a system for extracting and linking General Practitioner data across England with other health and social care data (Hoeksma, 2014). However, the scheme was met with negative responses from the public and health practitioners due in part to the potential for data disclosure and the decision to make the system 'opt-out', i.e. assume consent unless told otherwise. Care.data was eventually abandoned, despite the potential to radically change the evidence base for service provision and policy (Godlee, 2016). In the various 'post-mortem' examinations of care.data, it has been highlighted that there needed to be greater transparency around the scheme, particularly how people's data were being used and by whom (van Staa *et al.*, 2016). The need for greater transparency in how algorithms and data systems integrate data and operate can help people who are subjects/objects of these systems to question adverse decisions (Pleace, 2007; Alston, 2018), whilst drawing on consent mechanisms can address power imbalances between homeless people, and those collecting data about them as part of administrative systems. However, there is a complex interaction between ethical practices, such as consent, and addressing legal issues, as is now discussed.

Though the legal 'gateways' through which administrative data can be reused for research and measured vary internationally, the review highlighted three broad mechanisms that were applicable internationally, namely: (1) consent, (2) through legislation, and (3) obligation. Where use of data directly impacts service users, i.e. by being used in case management, consent to share and link data was obtained from the person being supported. The Online Navigation and Entry System in Chicago, as with other HMIS in the United States, operates as a shared case management system across the community, with data being accessible to other organisations involved in a person's care. Consent is asked for data to be 'visible' to different extents on the ONE System, e.g. sharing of all, some, or no information. However, within the EU data protection context, consent is only valid when freely given, which roughly equates to agreement to use of data without fear of repercussion or coercion. It has therefore been argued by the Information Commissioners Office (2019) in the United Kingdom that public authorities should avoid consent where other means of lawfully sharing data can be used. People using public services may feel coerced to provide data to gain 'better' services, with there existing a clear imbalance of power between individuals and service providers. Though the validity of consent can be argued in certain service contexts, it forms one aspect of ethical practice of engaging people in how their data are being used and addressing power imbalances in service provision. However, where consent is asked, use of other legal means to continue to use data against a person's wishes undermines the practice and validity of gaining consent.

Aside from consent, the other main gateway to enable use of data is through legislation, which was particularly the case where the purpose of data was for measurement and research uses. As an example, the Digital Economy Act (2017) in the United Kingdom is a piece of legislation designed specifically to facilitate the sharing and processing of data between public services for the purposes of service improvement, which includes provision for statistical (measurement) and research uses. However, when drawing on legislation to legitimate the sharing and processing of personal information, there are usually still obligations to the people whose data it is in making the processing fair and transparent, and informing them that their data are being used in certain ways. In the case of the statutory homelessness (H-CLIC) data system in England, 'privacy notices' were issued outlining how individual level data would be used through a layered approach involving posters in public places, information leaflets, and electronically placing the notice on local authority websites.

A final mechanism for data sharing is through obligation, usually to a funder, which was drawn on in only a handful of systems. For example, use of the Calgary Homeless Management Information System (CHMIS) is mandatory for all not-for-profit organisations receiving funding from the Calgary Homeless Foundation, with the CHMIS acting as a shared database and case management solution for homelessness services. However, where funded bodies are obliged to provide data, this does not necessarily obviate the need to abide by data protection legislation and other ethical obligations to the people whose data they are sharing. An example of obligation 'gone wrong' was the decision by the Ministry of Social Justice in New Zealand to contractually require funded third sector organisations to collect and report individual level data (Individual Client-Level Data, or ICLD). The decision to mandate ICLD was met with widespread negative response from several stakeholders, to the extent that a review of the data requirement was undertaken by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (Edwards, 2017). The review highlighted that the purpose for collecting data was unclear, and the requirement to collect individual level data could deter people accessing normal ‘low threshold’ services anonymously.

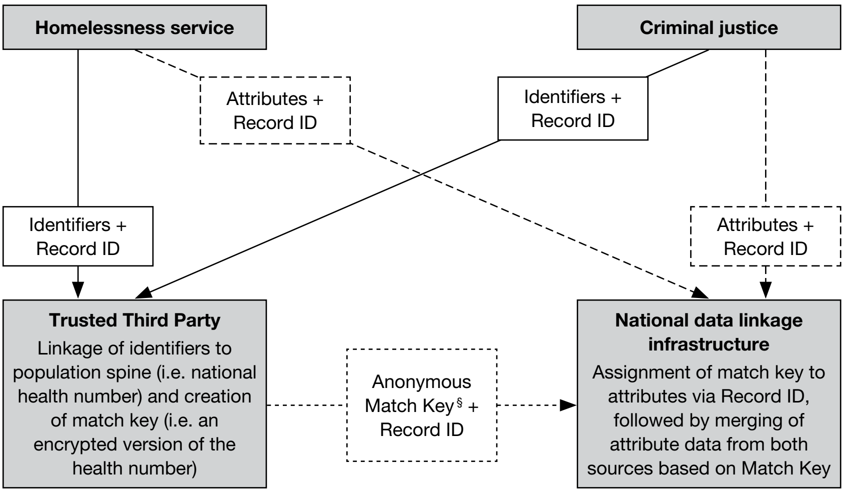
Privacy Preservation

Privacy is an important principle of any data system in increasingly ‘surveiled’ times (Pounder, 2008). Some of the approaches to ensuring the security of data throughout the sharing process are; (1) processing of data, i.e. aggregation, (2) anonymise or de-identify data, or (3) use personal data with added measures to ensure that disclosure risks are minimised, e.g. a ‘split file’ method of sharing data. Rather than any one of these approaches being ‘better’, measures taken to ensure the privacy and security of data vary depending on the intended use of data and the local and national legislation around sharing and processing personal data. For example, data as part of operational data-sharing platforms necessitates that people are identifiable given that the purpose of such a platform would presumably be to use the data to make decisions about the case (e.g. HIFIS in Canada and the Calgary HMIS). In cases where data are for statistical or research purposes, the need to measure the same individuals over repeated years, or to link data across sources, was the deciding factor in what method of privacy protection was used. For example, Michigan’s Statewide Homelessness Assistance Data online Warehouse (SHADoW) brings together data from numerous homeless Continuum of Care and other public services, in order to provide a research resource. However, without the ability to link between individual records, such a system would not be possible, thereby necessitating the sharing of identifying data.

De-identification of data means that data are effectively anonymised, whilst retaining the ability to link together data relating to the same person; whereas anonymisation would render data un-linkable, which may be appropriate if data are to be used as a standalone resource. When de-identifying data, the same person receives the same unique number throughout the data source, and preferentially across data sources. There were various examples of how the amount of personal data can be minimised or the risks of sharing reduced, including: using a national identification number (e.g. the Register of users of section 110 accommodation in Denmark uses the person’s national Central Personal Register number); creating a unique number based on personal data (e.g. Statistical Linkage Key in the Specialist Homelessness Service Collection (SHSC)/Specialist Homelessness Services National Minimum Data Set in Australia); assigning the person a unique number at random and retaining lookup tables to enable the same person to be assigned the same number if they re-enter a service (e.g. Local Authority Child Identifiers used in the Looked After Children Census in Wales); and encrypting personal identifiers or already existing unique identifiers (e.g. National Insurance numbers are encrypted before being sent to Scottish Government as part of the statutory homelessness collections HL1 and PREVENT1). De-identification at the source, such as through the creation of unique person numbers, overcomes the risk-averseness of organisations around sharing personal data. However, unless the same method of de-identification is shared with all other data providers participating in a system, the de-identified data will be unlinkable.

A 'split file' process can form the basis for national data linkage as it enables the consistent de-identification of data from any data source (e.g. Secure Anonymised Information Linkage databank in Wales). Personal identifiers (e.g. name, date of birth, gender, and postcode) are split from data relating to service histories, or 'attributes' (Figure 1). A trusted third party (TTP) receives the personal identifiers and links these to a 'population spine'—a population level set of unique identifiers. National health numbers are widely used as the basis for the population spine in the United Kingdom. Linking to a population spine ensures that the same person, from multiple sources (e.g. homelessness and police data in Figure 1), is assigned the same unique identifier number, and can therefore be linked across all data sources. Unfortunately, this method of de-identifying data does not overcome the initial hurdle of organisations being risk averse, as the personal data still need to be shared with the TTP.

Figure 1: Illustration of hypothetical 'split file' process used to combine data from homelessness services and criminal justice system



§ Match Key is unique to person across all data sources, and usually retained in perpetuity within the data linkage infrastructure to enable continued linkage of data.

Source: Adapted from Harron (2016)

Data Accessibility and Access

For data to have value, the information generated from it needs to be accessible to a wide range of audiences with varying levels of data literacy, whilst there ideally also needs to be a means via which data can be accessed so that stakeholders can meet their own information/knowledge needs. Drawing on the 'public health' literature, data made accessible to local stakeholders can enhance accountability and action and achieve greater impact than data and analysis that are reported at only national levels (World Health Organisation, 2017, p.32). This emphasises the importance of data and knowledge flowing across boundaries, rather than being siloed by governments and states, or only being the preserve of data analysts and academic knowledge brokers. Three very broad mechanisms were identified for achieving data accessibility and access: (1) digesting the data to generate information (e.g. portals, dashboards, and meta-data), (2) making the raw data available (e.g. for download), and (3) mediating the access of data (e.g. through data labs). However, one commonality was that the use of visualisation significantly improved the accessibility of data, with this holding true across data at different units of analysis, i.e. individual level up to aggregate data.

When directly linked to local administrative data systems, well designed dashboards can provide easily interpretable 'live' insight into homelessness in an area, which can enable communities to track the impacts of their activities on, for example, returns to homelessness, e.g. Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Operating at a more granular level were the North West London Whole Systems Integrated Care dashboards that visualise information about individuals in order to reconstruct their interactions with health and social care services; visualisation can then be used by people involved in a persons' care to make future decisions. Increasing the accessibility of data by presenting pre-analysed 'bits' of information can shorten the feedback loop between data generation and action, with this being the driving force behind many campaigns to end homelessness, such as Community Solutions and their Built for Zero campaigns in the United States (Community Solutions, 2018).

Access to 'granular' data at the individual or household level is understandably more constrained due to legal and ethical issues around privacy, with access to only de-identified or completely anonymised data available in most cases. Anonymised or de-identified data were found to be accessible either via provisioning of extracts directly to the requester (e.g. Virginia Longitudinal Data System, where data from across the federation are compiled and made available for download), or, more often, within a secure data environment (e.g. New Zealand Integrated Data Infrastructure, or Dementias Platform UK Data Portal). Secure data environments can be physically secure spaces, such as the HMRC Data Lab in the

United Kingdom, where tax records can be accessed using computer terminals in a 'secure room' based in the HMRC offices in London (Almunia *et al*., 2019). Alternatively, a secure environment could be a virtual workspace within which all research is conducted and can be accessed remotely via any Internet enabled computer, such as the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage databank 'Gateway' in Wales (Jones *et al.*, 2014). Physical settings are often limited in number, meaning that researchers can sometimes be required to travel to a setting to access data, which may be impractical for some researcher teams; remotely accessible secure environments therefore reduce these access barriers.

Often neglected as a means of making 'granular' raw data accessible, i.e. interpretable, is meta-data, which are data about data and outline the variables contained in a data set and the values the variables take. Meta-data can be consulted prior to or during research in order to determine the suitability of a data source for a research project, i.e. that it contains the variables needed. However, despite the importance of meta-data in making sense of data, there is a widely acknowledged lack of meta-data that can be a barrier to access and use of administrative data (van Panhuis, 2014; Jones *et al.*, 2019), significantly frustrating any use of the data in a timely manner as users of data must spend time understanding the data prior to actual analysis. In addition to making research and analysis a difficult task, a lack of meta-data can also complicate sharing of data between organisations—which speaks back to the need for data standards (themselves a form of meta-data), as a way of achieving a shared 'data language'.

To close, several data systems incorporated knowledge mediators through 'data labs' and software, whose role was to analyse data on behalf of service providers, who may not have the capacity or capability to conduct primary research and evaluation with individual level data. The Ministry of Justice DataLab (MOJ DataLab) in the United Kingdom offers third sector organisations the opportunity to explore the possible associations between their services and their users' recidivism—measured as reconviction rates (Lyon *et al*., 2015). Organisations submit personal identifiers (i.e. name, date of birth, address) of the individuals taking part in their programme/services to DataLab, who then link this data to the criminal justice data MOJ hold—primarily prison data, but also police data—and generate a comparison group of similar characteristics. A standard report is then generated that compares recidivism rates between people receiving the programme/service and the comparison group. In a more automated approach to mediated knowledge generation, Stella P in the United States is a piece of software developed for use by Continuum of Care that enables them to upload data from their HMIS systems and for that data to be visualised, thereby enabling them to assess the performance of their homeless service system.

Summary: Building an Ideal Homelessness Administrative Data System

In relation to each of the six design elements we conclude that in order to improve the use of administrative data to end homelessness, whether through its measurement or through research or practical decision-making, systems should:

- Strive to accommodate measurement, research, and operational purposes in order to maximise the use of data in ending homelessness. At a minimum, a homelessness administrative data system should be flexible enough to evolve over time to meet different functional uses and data requirements.
- Adopt a centralised data architecture model in order to provide a permanent data pool, more likely to be characterised by quality, consistent data, that persists historically, thereby enabling longitudinal measurement and research.
- Use a multi-faceted approach to data quality, combining standardisation, monitoring and automated validation, as this is likely to lead to improvements in quality and consistency, particularly in situations where multiple organisations of differing service provision are providing data. Maintenance of data quality should also be considered integral to any administrative data system, given that poor quality data can impact decision-making—and therefore have serious ethical consequences for homeless people.
- A nuanced combination of consent, legislation, and obligation is likely to be necessary to navigate the ethical and legal collection and processing of individual level personal data of homeless people. Though administrative data are important as a means of measuring homelessness, it is crucial that the requirement to collect data should not deter people from accessing services, nor should it compound the already existing power imbalances between people seeking assistance and homeless services by placing demands upon them.
- Privacy is an important principle of any data system in increasingly 'surveiled' times. However, in many cases in order to engage in accurate measurement of homelessness that eliminates double counting and potentially over-inflates estimates, services and researchers require person level data. Where this is the case, the default should be to de-identify data or share personal data with added measures to ensure that disclosure risks are minimised.
- For data to have value, the information generated from administrative data systems need to be accessible and understood by a wide range of audiences with varying levels of data literacy. To achieve this goal we argue for a combina-

tion of approaches, including: the development of data portals and dashboards; making the raw data available for own analyses; and mediating the access of data through data labs that can foster a culture of research and evaluation.

Conclusions

This paper has synthesised international examples of administrative data systems in order to stage a discussion of the 'methodology' of administrative data, which we pose as a series of six areas to consider when designing a new administrative data system. This discussion is important given the increasing international use of administrative data for the purposes of measuring and researching homelessness. In addition to aiding the design of new homelessness data systems, the design elements outlined in this paper provide a way of sensitising researchers and policy makers to the socially constructed nature of the administrative data used to measure homelessness. Decisions made under each of the six design areas outlined create a reality of homelessness-in-data.

Researchers drawing on administrative data from pre-existing administrative data sources should always be wary of the socially constructed origins of these data in organisational practices, which they themselves come to reflect, such that administrative data are not an 'objective' view of the world but embedded in particular institutionalised ways of knowing (Gomm, 2004). Decision-making by service facing staff in the homelessness sector will vary within and across organisations due to individual interpretations of policy and practice guidance, whilst their data recording practices will be dependent on workloads (De Witte *et al.,* 2016). At best, administrative data therefore offer one viewpoint of homelessness through the lens of institutions.

Finally, we must reiterate a fundamental limitation of administrative data are their generation from interactions between organisations and people, i.e. where people enter or are entered (potentially involuntarily) into 'systems'. Whilst many people will seek assistance in their homelessness journey, there are others, particularly those with no recourse to public funds, who may not enter any system. From an analytical perspective we could console ourselves that 'at some point' populations appearing in different administrative data systems will likely overlap and are therefore not truly missing; this however is of little practical use if the intention is prevention of harm. The point at which a person enters (homelessness) administrative data systems is arguably too late from a prevention perspective. Therefore, whilst this paper seeks to advance the method of administrative data, we recognise that they need to be part of a wider 'data landscape' on homelessness, one supplemented by other methods that may be better suited to providing insight on particular populations not 'visible' to institutions.

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Measuring Homelessness by City Counts – Experiences from European Cities

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Abstract_ *For the past few years, homelessness has increasingly been recorded at the city level. On the one hand, this is because national surveys are completely lacking or do not provide sufficient data at city level; on the other hand, cities in particular are noticing an increase in homelessness and city politicians are under pressure to act. In this context, several questions arise as regards theoretical framing of the city counts, methodological issues, conceptualising, and comparability of data and results over time and places. So far, there has been no common understanding about a city count and each city in Europe seems to develop its own approach in measuring homelessness by a city count. At the same time, international attention has been paid to mapping these experiences and methodological approaches across different European cities. This paper is a first attempt towards a comparability of the sense and the purpose of a city count. Based on city counts in four cities Basel, Bratislava, Brussels, and Budapest, the paper discusses theoretical pathways towards counts, highlights the role of stakeholders, the area of a counting and the relationship between data and political consequences.*

Keywords_ *Homelessness, city count, Europe, methodology*

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Introduction

Back in 2005 the first European cooperative attempt to operationalise homelessness resulted in the European Typology of Homelessness (ETHOS) (FEANTSA, 2005), leading to shifting the approach to the EU level; "Measuring Homelessness at European Union Level" (Edgar *et al*., 2007) and the "MPHASIS" project (2008-2009) moved towards recommending a "common definition of homelessness as well as a list of statistical variables on homelessness for European data collection purposes" (FEANTSA, 2011, p.4). In 2011, FEANTSA published a pilot study with an aim to test cross-country comparability of homelessness data collection in six European cities (FEANTSA, 2011). However, the main focus of the study was on data availability in participating cities, the variable definitions used, and the comparability of the variables. The data collection techniques were not particularly in the focus of the analysis.

In this paper, we would like to contribute to the debate on the city counts in Europe, based mainly on the data of the cities Basel, Bratislava, and Brussels, where the authors were responsible for a count. Moreover, we refer to the "Budapest count" for the sake of comparison, but actually, this is just one location of the Hungarian "February 3rd Count" initiative, which is a survey launched 21 years ago, as of today covering most of the larger cities in Hungary. To complete our argumentation or illustrate some of our theses, we included references to further city or regional counts in Europe. The main objective of this paper is to identify options that are currently available in Europe in measuring homelessness at the city level, and how the initial purpose, the landscape of actors, the places and areas selected for the count and the methodologies of data collection remarkably influence the city counts' scope (e.g. socio-political decisions). We intend to discuss commonalities and differences in city counts in Europe in recent years, and explore the potential for standardisation at least in certain aspects of measuring homelessness at the city level. In this sense, this article does not intend to present the only one and right solution for a city count. Rather, by clarifying the different approaches, a contribution is to be made to present the varieties in approaches linked with a set of different policy approaches to policy and institutional design, and to how homelessness is being framed as a social phenomenon.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first deals with the theoretical framing of city counts in homelessness research, then we take a closer look at counts in action. In section four we look for the 'largest common denominators' in the methodologies of city counts, to then describe typical stakeholders of counts, the definition of "territory", and the implications of methodologies in action. We conclude with some lessons learned.

Framing City Counts Theoretically

In the field of city counts there are only a few works that build on a distinct theoretical framework. These are mostly linked with a critical school, such as Marquardt's socio-political economy of city counts (Marquardt, 2016). She points out that data and figures have become instruments of power in modern welfare states. And where nationwide homeless statistics are missing, her hypothesis is that the difficulties to count homeless people as argued by politicians is nothing less than a case of 'ontological ignorance'. "Statistics are the knowledge of the state" (2016, p. 302) and "a form of power-knowledge" (2016, p. 303). In that sense Marquardt (2016, p.306) writes about "the ontology of modern sedentariness: streets, homes, addresses" and asks why homeless people are not counted. In referring Foucault, she suspects the state does not to want to know. In Marquardt's (2016, p.307) concept, a nationwide statistic is not just counting people, it is "an attempt to highlight the political nature of ignorance". According to her, economic rationality overlaps social reality and excluded people are banned by ignorance. In recent years, there has not only been a disregard for homelessness, but in many countries a criminalisation of homeless people. Countries like Hungary, where the constitutional amendment of 2018 prohibits living and sleeping on the streets officially, are the clearest indicator that the state perceives social groups as a threat even without quantitative data (Győri, 2018). In Croatia, for many years, NGOs have been fighting for homeless people to receive a passport and thus to achieve social rights in the first place (Šikić-Mićanović, 2010). In Poland, selective social policies, unsatisfying housing conditions, unemployment and poverty in the countryside make many people leave their home and seek a better chance for living elsewhere (Mostowska, 2014).

But there is also the other side of the state institutions, which endeavours to collect the exact numbers and profiles in order to improve the quality of the assistance and help. Metropolitan cities where street homelessness is very obvious play a pivotal role in this. Cities like Paris for example, where the National Council on Statistical Information in response to requests from a number of major voluntary organisations, established a working group to prepare a plan for the scientific study of living conditions of the homeless, the processes whereby people become homeless, and the difficulties they face in obtaining housing (Firdion and Marpsat, 2007). Paris also conducted rough sleepers counts in 2018 and 2019, launching a new wave of data collection, with refined methods (Atelier Parisien D'Urbanisme, 2018; 2019). Some larger cities frame their policies in a more strategic approach: for example the city of Manchester, where the city administration reflected the national trend in the rising number of households that have lost their home and developed a Homelessness Charter and a Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 "to ensure that personal circumstances are not a barrier to accessing services and opportunities, and give extra support to those who might need it to overcome these structural issues" (Manchester City Council, 2018, p.3).

In this sense, counting is not just a technical answer to missing data, but a socio-political manifesto: people affected by rooflessness and housing exclusion call on the welfare state to take care of them in particular. This raises the question of *how* answers are constructed and then measured.

City Counts – Understandings and Implications

Clearly, the rationale behind the city counts is that national data do not exist or do not allow conclusions about the extent and the structure of homelessness in cities; moreover, the service providers lack evidence for planning and delivery of programmes for their clients. However, it is noticeable that the starting positions, procedures and understandings of what is "counted" differ widely (Perresini *et al*., 2010). In short, it has not been very clear, whether the city count has some specific meaning, and what it is. Two aspects might seem especially puzzling when seeking to address this issue:

1. Other terms than city count, such as street count, or rough-sleepers count seem to be more commonly used in the homelessness research literature (Edgar *et al*., 2007; Baptista *et al*., 2012). Therefore, clarifications are needed on whether and how they are different from city counts.

2. Having the term 'count' in its title, it might be assumed that the city count refers to a specific methodology, or at least has a potential to do so. Still, this premise should be approached with some caution.

As it comes to the first aspect, terminological clarifications and the distinction between three types of counts is needed: city count, street count, and rough-sleepers count. In homeless research, street count often refers to the enumeration of the people sleeping rough (Edgar *et al*., 2007; Baptista *et al*., 2012; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (UK) (2019)). In terms of who is counted, street count and rough sleepers count seem to refer to the one and the same thing. In this regard, as shown later in this article, city counts usually do include enumeration (if not a census) of people sleeping rough, but their ambition is also to reach other people experiencing homelessness. Another common feature of the three types of counts is that they all generate point-in-time figures (Edgar *et al*., 2007), although and again, the time in which the count takes place can be shorter for rough-sleeper counts than city counts. Nevertheless, the data gained in all three types of counts simply inform on the stock of homeless people in the time of the count, without being linked to the inflow or outflow of homeless people through-out a longer time period. This is a clear caveat of city counts, similar to other types of point-in-time surveys: the snapshot they create may overrepresent easy-to-reach groups and long-term homeless. Point-in- time counts underrepresent people who rotate in and out of shelters and people who have a short episode of homelessness. People who stay in shelters for shorter periods of time will be underrepresented compared to those that are long-term shelter users and these are individuals and families who use shelters for long periods of time (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2014, p.76). Point-in-time counts smooth out dynamics in homelessness and overrepresents the phenomenon of permanent homelessness. The duration of the count remarkably determines the stock and structure of homelessness. It makes a difference whether the census in the defined survey areas lasts a few hours or a week or whether it is continuous (using continuous administrative data).

If such data collections are applied for actual policy design, they may risk not covering all relevant groups and more hidden groups, including women, younger people, people in transit, and giving a wrong profile to homelessness in a given city – and hence an ineffective response to homelessness in general. Also, if the counts narrow down the public perception of homelessness and housing exclusion to – more or less – rough sleeping, this may distort and harm the discussions about adequate policy responses to homelessness. This caveat may be partly mitigated if counts are carried out frequently enough, using different methods of data collection and based on an extended network of providers responding to emerging needs of homeless people, to follow up rapid societal changes.

This is one of the reasons why under changing landscapes of services, needs, or at least, according to the perception of needs, initiatives and NGOs keep the providers' pool in continuous development, reaching out to extending and changing target groups. Establishing contacts with homeless people opens up new perspectives – and responsibilities – for data collections, too. Moreover, a few cities worldwide take part in a range of initiatives like the international registry week (Mercy Foundation, 2017), along with further advocacy activities to show that there is a tremendous need to effectively address homelessness – based on evidence, at the strategic level.

Concerning the second aspect of understanding, it was assumed for long that in terms of data sources, counts present a specific form of direct survey in which people are met and counted in person, although they are not necessarily interviewed, in contrast to registration or administrative records, and general population and census data (Edgar *et al*., 2007; Busch-Geertsema, *et al*., 2010). This has still been the case for most city counts – in fact, the lack of comprehensive administrative data, including data which would be produced by adjoining services on homeless clients, is one of the main reasons why these counts are organised. Still, there seems to be some shift towards combining direct surveys and the administrative data. For instance, the report on the latest data on rough-sleepers in England as a country with a well-established monitoring system of rough-sleepers due to its long-lasting tradition (Edgar *et al*., 2007) notes that in 2018, evidence-based estimates, and estimates informed by spotlight street counts were used more frequently by local municipalities than street counts to provide the figures on the rough-sleepers in England (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (UK) (2019). Similarly, the city counts in Brussels and Barcelona have combined registration data with the street count (FEANTSA 2018).

Finally, for the very same reason of the lack of administrative data, contrary to the street counts and the rough sleeper counts, city counts went behind the enumeration of rough sleeping people and people in homeless provision and contained a survey based on questionnaires and interviews.

Assuming city count as a specific methodology, so far, each city defines the methodology and analysis procedures considering their own context, circumstances and objectives of the count. Even a glance at selected cities in Europe shows how differently a city count is interpreted (see Table 1; see also Edgar *et al*., 2002, p.4; Gallwey, 2017). This is in part connected with the heterogeneity of the cities themselves, the density of services for homeless people, and the governance structures they are embedded in. In this context, it is a challenge to note that city counts should not be "inseparable from the uses to which it is put" (Brousse, 2016, p.105). This might be appropriate for the local situation, but it does not go far enough for methodologically sound research and action on homelessness (European Commission, 2004, p.89).

Table 1. City counts in Europe – examples

City / Country	Year of first / most recent count	Periodicity / No. of counts until 2019	Methods used in the latest count	Data collection tools
Barcelona (ES)	2008 / 2018	Irregular /since 2015 annually (May 17)	Point-in-time Street count Registration data: people in the accommodation for the homeless	Observation protocol
Basel (CH)	2018 / 2018	none	Point-in-time Interviews in the day-care centres Spotlight street count: observation	Questionnaire: users of services Observation protocol: street count
Bratislava (SK)	2016 / 2016	none	Point-in-time Street count: interviews Service users count: interviews	Questionnaire: people sleeping rough or at the night-shelters Questionnaire: people in homeless shelters
Budapest (HU)	1999 / 2020	Annually (February)	Survey, part of a nation-wide data collection Partly rough sleeper count	Self-filled questionnaire for service users and people sleeping rough in contact with outreach teams
Brussels (BE)	2008 / 2018	Biannually	Point-in-time Street count: observation Registration data and point-in-time data: people in the accommodation for the homeless	Observation protocol: street count Interviews with visitors of the day centres 2 weeks before and on the day after the count
Dublin (IRL)	2007 / 2019 2011	Bi-annual Street Count Quarterly	Point-in-time Street count Monitoring engagement: Housing First Intake Team (HFIT) gather demographic and support need data over time	Ongoing engagement with individual rough sleepers Monitoring: multiple interactions with an individual and store information in a Support System
Paris (FR)	2018 / 2019	Potentially annual (February)	Point-in-time Street count Interviews	Questionnaire for individuals, families and groups of more than 5 people
Warsaw (PL)	2010/2019	Biannually (February)	Street count: interviews Registration data: people from all possible places	Questionnaire for homeless Observation protocol: street count

Source: own research.

Although they are designed to enumerate homeless people, city counts need not only be understood as a specific methodological approach to collect the data on homelessness at the city level. Rather they can be approached as data collection systems at the local level, using a whole range of methodologies to measure *stock* figures on homelessness. From this perspective, it would then be too optimistic to expect unification of data collection systems at the local level while not having it at the national or European level (Baptista *et al*., 2012; Busch-Geertsema *et al*., 2014). At the same time, it has to be avoided that as long as there is no unifying European social policy, answers will be lost even on the local and national scale (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

Some co-ordination might be possible and welcome even in this case. In fact, such development can be observed in Hungary where the survey which originally took place in Budapest was spread to other large cities. This was possible by an exclusively bottom-up development, driven by service providers who initiated the survey. At the same time, policy makers have been picking up figures gained through the surveys, thus, making it the legitimate data collection on homelessness in Hungary. In other countries, national data elaborations – like Denmark – conclude for local levels about service needs for hidden homeless and homeless populations. There are data collections (combined, register based, or surveys) which are also conclusive for the local levels. For example, most recently, after data collections at the federal state level, Germany has developed a methodology to produce national statistics on homelessness from 2022 – first based on occupied beds, which will be then followed up with the help of research on hidden homeless and rough sleepers.

On a critical note, however, city counts vs. national data collections have a further implication, which links us back to the critical approach as formulated by Marquardt (2016): the evidence produced at *and* for the local level seems to imply homelessness could be solely and exclusively solved at local level, and basically seems to resolve the national level from policy responsibilities, which is already legally considered clearly not the case in a number of countries.

The Largest Common Denominator in the Methodologies of City Counts

Due to the heterogeneity of the counts and data in general, it is not surprising that neither a clarification nor a comparison exist about the *actual* number and composition of *homeless* people in European cities – given the different sets of policy frameworks, institutional interest and drivers, definitions, and data collection methods applied (detailed in Baptista and Marlier, 2019). None of the city counts mentioned in this paper was created for such an ambitious goal.

If we look at the current tableau of city counts (Table 1), the differences of approaches and methods are particularly remarkable. Considering all these conditions that influence a city count, and all the questions that need to be answered in detail, there is a high degree of variation and complexity in terms of city censuses.

Three dimensions of basic importance seem to emerge from the perspective of the authors: *Actor*, *Territory* and *Methods*. These dimensions act as initial conditions that each count is required to be based on and have a crucial influence on the empirical results obtained and their later impact on social policy, social planning and change. At the same time, they can be used to explain how different results about homelessness counts in European cities come about.

- Actor: Administrations and above all NGOs can be considered as initiators. They have inherent organisational goals that ultimately determine the technical and financial framework within which the census/count takes place. Typical are ethical issues like conflicting goals, as can be illustrated by the examples of Brussels and Budapest, in the latter, linked with the criminalisation of homelessness at the end of 2010, during the preparations of the 2011 Census, which lead to a complete reorientation or even the termination of a planned data collection. The attitude of actors towards a survey, especially of the institutions that deal with people without homes, has a crucial influence on the success of the study (response rate, validity of the results). Counts also differ whether homeless people are included in any phases of the counts' planning, implementation, evaluation and dissemination.
- Territory: The power to define the area of research determines the extent, and by that, the profile of homelessness. The most important question is whether the territory in which a survey takes place is defined administratively or "functionally" and how close the area of research to the reality of life of the homeless people is. This means for example, that the region surrounding the city and thus the interdependencies that homeless people have (day-night migration in/out of the administrative city) is also taken into account, or, whether forms beyond rough sleeping are also observed. By that, census data from different administrative units need to be combined. Also, inside the administrative city borders the definition of territory plays a crucial role: city counts based on direct data need to define whether private open space is relevant, or to what extend the inner-building arrangements are part of the counting. With repeated city counts it is important to take in account the point-in-time weather conditions or events such as a large demonstration with police action or a public transport strike. Such events can make rough sleepers leave their usual place and spend the night at a different location.
- Methods: Data are the basis of a scientific based political action. As in other fields of research, the choice of method influences the outcome and the image of homelessness in a city. A known limitation concerns the administration data: People who avoid homelessness services, are underrepresented in estimations of the extent and structure of homelessness based on administrative data

(Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014, p.9). Censuses at the city level can more easily complete the picture of homelessness. At first sight it seems direct approaches, asking and interviewing homeless people, are easier to implement. But a survey also presents considerable challenges that influence the results. They affect the entire interview setting, i.e. the interviewer, the place and time of the survey and the questionnaire. Under certain conditions those survey results can be combined with administrative data. According to Busch-Geertsema (2014) city counts therefore are based on a constructive approach: They use census data and combine them with other existing data sources. Many cities, however, do not have this data quality or ask questions that cannot be answered with the existing data. They follow an *indirect* approach: designing questionnaires or observation protocols.

Actors, territory and methods are not independent from each other. In particular, the method depends to a large extent on the actors and the defined survey areas. The choice of territory is in turn not only done by scientists but also by politicians, clients and other actors. The involvement and choice of the actors not only influences the results achieved, but also the subsequent acceptance and the potential for socio-political decisions that can be achieved through empirical findings.

Mapping Stakeholders, their Interests and Influences

In the previous section, actors initiating the count were identified as one of three most important factors determining the scope of the count. In fact, it seems obvious that at least due to the large areas that the counts are to cover, they are organised in co-operation of several organisations. This may happen at two stages of the count: planning and/or data collection (but not at the stage of interpreting data). As shown in Table 2, the actors landscape can be described in a typology: city counts are authority based, NGO-driven or co-designed and embed various actors.

Table 2. Stakeholders within city counts – a typology

Stakeholder typology	City	Actors initiating the count	Actors involved in data collection	Data collection actors
Authority based	Paris (FR)	City Mayor	Professional staff & volunteers (trained)	Volunteer-driven
Authority based	Dublin (IRE)	Dublin Region Homeless Executive	Professional staff & volunteers (trained)	Professional
NGO-driven	Brussels (BE)	Non-profit support Center for the homeless sector, created by public authorities, service providers	NGO staff & volunteers from service providers. Students and (former) homeless people for the interviews	Professional
NGO-driven	Budapest (HU)	Service providers	Homeless people self-fill questionnaires	Volunteer-driven
Co-designed	Barcelona (ES)	Network of organisations in the homeless sector, city council	Volunteers & professional staff	Volunteer-driven
Co-designed	Basel (CH)	Research institute, service providers	Students & NGO staff	Semi-professional
Co-designed	Bratislava (SK)	City, research institute, service providers	NGO staff & volunteers (trained)	Semi-professional
Co-designed	Warsaw (PL)	Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, Office of Assistance and Social Projects of the City of Warsaw, Social Welfare Centers of the City of Warsaw	NGO staff, street-workers, trained city guards, police officers and railway security guards	Professional and Semi-professional

Source: own research.

The variety of stakeholders involved in the city count may have various implications for management of co-operation, communication of findings, or the sustainability of the counts. And sharing ownership and responsibilities is an effective way to increase engagement of stakeholders (including dissemination activities). Brussels and Barcelona represent such cities in which network organisations operate to provide support to the whole homeless sector. These are the actors with a potential to manage the count even through longer periods exceeding the elections cycles, although they may also find themselves in conflicting situations. Despite that, while in Brussels, mostly service providers were involved in designing the city count, in Barcelona the city council was directly participating as well.

Bratislava has established a partnership of stakeholders whose differing inputs were necessary to be able to manage the count. The involvement of the City Council and service providers was useful in several ways. Service Providers provided access to the field and homeless people in hard-to-reach areas could be included. The City Council provided organizational support for the study and used the findings to develop new policies to address homelessness. The research institute was responsible for coordination of the count, and preparation and evaluation of the survey. On the one hand, the count benefited from this broad partnership. On the other hand, the effort and complexity to obtain such support in every count is high.

Sustaining the counts may similarly be challenging for Paris, where the key actor is Paris mayor. On the other hand, involvement of city representatives ensures a strong mandate for awareness-raising to the wide public. In fact, Paris has communicated the count as the Night of Solidarity, and has joined over 2 000 volunteers. In Basel, the first impulse for a census came from the University of Applied Sciences. As part of an international networking activity, the research group there realised that Switzerland has no conception of the number of homeless people. The scholars contacted the city's service providers directly and designed the census in cooperation with practitioners right from the very beginning. This resulted in a high response rate, but at the same time questions that promised little practical relevance could only be included in the questionnaire to a limited extent.

In those cases where the city count is organised by multiple stakeholders an earlier phase of negotiations about the aims of the count became necessary. This phase not only serves to sharpen the procedure about who is to be counted where and why; these multi-stakeholder conferences also generate a common view of the problem and often end in an agreement. For example, a multi-stakeholder conference in Belgium noted that measuring homelessness can't be realised by means of one method or instrument. "To monitor this social problem comprehensively, a combination of methods is needed. A second conclusion is to develop a monitoring strategy that realises a balance between available results in the short time and a long-term strategy to map homelessness comprehensively. A third conclusion is that the monitoring strategy needs to be based on 13 crucial principles which were identified together with all relevant stakeholders." (Demaerschalk et al., 2018, p. 7) The principles (Figure 1) were transferred from the consensus conference to the Brussels census. And in general, the city count in Brussels can serve as a model in various ways: Homeless people for instance were included as stakeholders in different ways: they specified the questionnaire by contributing with their daily-life-knowledge (this was also a way of informing the homeless people about the date of the city count and giving them – for ethical reasons – the option of not being counted) and the interviews were conducted by duos of (former) homeless people and students.

Figure 1: Principles of the Belgian consensus conference

Street counting as part of a monitoring …
… follows a national plan
… has a clear goal
… is part of the national and regional action plans to reduce poverty and fight homelessness
… shows clear engagement from policy makers
… uses ETHOS as a common definition of homelessness
… is based on shared ownership and shared responsibility
… aims to create a win-win situation
… avoids negative impact on homeless persons
… is based on a mixed method approach
… has a focus on prevention
… includes narratives
… gives feedback
… is coordinated

Source: Demaerschalk et al. (2018)

How the Definition of "Territory" Shapes the Topography of Homelessness

Territory is a geographical, sociological and emotional concept and refers to different types of space: in a point in time count homeless people are met or observed at a specific place that can be mapped. This is a geographical perspective of space and follows an absolute, Euclidian understanding. Territory here is equivalent to the city defined by the administration.

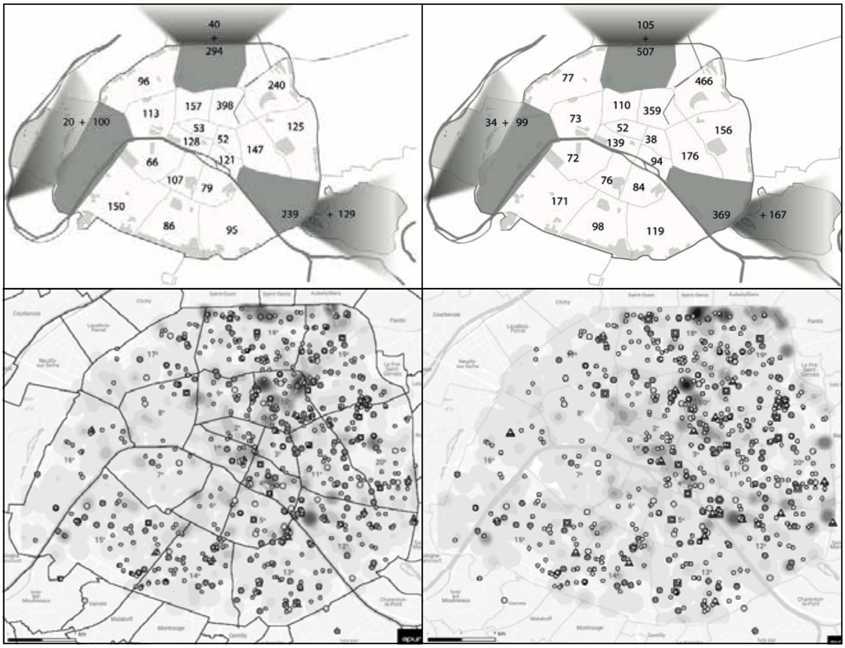
In the city count of New York, researchers from the Institute for Children, Policy and Homelessness (ICPH) used this understanding as a starting point to work out different neighbourhood profiles; they mapped the number of homeless people in accordance to the neighbourhood in which they stay overnight and qualified in the report the specific neighbourhood in terms of their social qualities. This is a sociological concept of territory because it follows a social space approach and look into community factors driving homelessness. According to the scientists of ICPH, it is important to study geographic patterns of neighbourhood instability and community resources to assess needs and determine if resources are being allocated to the areas in which people are the most at risk for homelessness. Their thesis in focusing on neighbourhoods in New York is that it is important to "study geographic patterns of neighborhood instability and community resources to assess need and determine if resources are being allocated to the areas in which families are the most at risk for homelessness." (ICPH, 2019, p. 1) The case of New York introduces the potential that a city count can have, for instance in combination with a social area analysis. It sensitises for the links between place, time and social structure.

Finally, homeless persons can be asked if they want to be excluded from different spatial arrangements like institutions, social groups, specific local benefits, or even particular events at specific places – this refers to emotional geographies and the embodiment of homelessness. The Basel count combined the geographical and the emotional concept of territory by asking the interviewees' opinion "What would have to be done to make it easier for homeless people to find a place to live in Basel". In order to avoid processes of social exclusion, homeless people are asked about their relationship to special places in the city. But focusing counting on opening hours of services does not prevent the fundamental difficulties to count in the growing number of undocumented people who seek refuge in the anonymity of big cities. They do not figure in administrative databases, because their social rights are restricted. Undocumented people have the status of illegally staying residents, they often make no use (for fear of being deported) and/or have no access to social or even homelessness services. Those homeless people become invisible and thus uncountable by observation. In the same direction goes the ethnographical work of scholars using hermeneutic methods or action research (e.g. Lancione, 2003) or visual anthropology (which has been impressively documented by a team of journalists from the Los Angeles Times: https://www.latimes.com/86340416-132.html).

In the core of city counts we seldom experience social space concepts or emotional concepts of space except when interviews or narrative dialogues are conducted during the count. Generally speaking, a city count is based on a geographical approach, which means that the location matters: where the person is observed, it is counted and this information is taken to represent the number of homeless people, and their distribution. In this sense, a point-in-time count is also a point-in-place count. Some consequences arise from a point-in-time-and-place count, which can be explained by the Paris count (see Figure 2, 1st row, highlighted by grey shadow). It is not made clear why the organisers have chosen a design of counting that goes beyond the administrative borders of the city and enlarges the territory to the regions of "La Colline" in the north, "Bois de Vincennes" (east) and "Bois de Boulogne" (west). But by analysing the map of social infrastructure for homeless people (Figure 2, 2nd row), it is obvious that not only the temporary but also the permanent structures (shelters, boarding house, contact points, etc.) are concentrated at the fringe of the city borders. With 189 out of 3 035 homeless persons counted in 2018 and 305 out of 3 641 homeless persons counted in 2019, about 6.2 per cent (2018) or 8.4 per cent (2019) of all homeless persons slept outside the administrative territory of the city.

There is the thesis that a count which is following the administrative city definition influences in smaller cities not only the number but the profile of homeless people counted. There is no empirical evidence yet, but information gathered from qualitative studies in Basel (Drilling *et al.*, 2020) leads to the assumption that several homeless people cross the city border in the evening to find their sleeping place in the countryside. That might be one reason to prefer counting in smaller cities during opening hours of services.

Figure 2: Changing numbers of counted homeless person in the Paris count 2018 (left) and 2019 (right)



Source: Atelier Parisien D'Urbanisme (2018, 2019), own editing.

Another aspect of the role of territory in counting numbers is reported by Busch-Geertsema *et al.* (2019, pp.176f.). According to them, in Ireland, until 2010 it has been the practice to include as rough sleepers "only those persons who are either already asleep or bedded down on the street, in public places or in dwellings not intended for human habitation on the reference date or on the reference date night." In 2010 when the definition changed, "those who are 'about to be bedded down', i.e. sitting on a bench with a sleeping bag, for example, are also included'." Other decisions on the territorial concept are mentioned by the scholars, as following: are people in emergency accommodation or drug counselling centres counted as street homeless? Are people counted as homeless who are observed in condemned buildings, car wrecks or tents? These examples open up a further meaning of space in city counts. For even the scale level "micro-space" influences the results of a count. Whether it is a matter of counting an entire city area or whether it is restricted to individual neighbourhoods or areas is still the easier question to answer. How, on the other hand, the micro-places that are considered to be street homelessness are defined, and even whether a person who is standing instead of lying down is included in a census, are central questions that ultimately help to determine the number of people counted.

On the Political Relevance of Data and its Influences on City Counts

The linkage between politics and social research is interpreted in different areas and for a long time as tense and ambivalent (Orlans, 1971). As Bourdieu (1991) points out, sociological research is invariably steeped in the politics of power and privilege. Politicians have recognised the high effectiveness and credibility that academic science and the "reality" of statistics radiates. With data and scientific substantiation, political decisions can be legitimised and the previous agenda setting in the discourse on social problems, e.g. homelessness can be changed (Best, 2001). Few studies discuss the influence of policy on empirical research on homelessness. Fitzpatrick *et al*. (2000, p.49) have suggested that informing social policy is the only ethical justification for homelessness research. This implies a willingness for homelessness researchers to work together with politics, also in the field of censuses and counts. Minnery and Greenhalg (2007) criticise a close relationship between politics and empirical research in homelessness research for scientific reasons. Bacchi (2009) and Farrugia and Gerrard (2016) problematise the close link between homelessness research and neoliberal forms of politics and governance. Related to the practical implementation of a city count, a directive, top-down regulated style of politics hinders forms of cooperation and hampers confidence-building between actors involved in a city count. The implementation of a count is limited if politicians (and the administration) do not have a high level of acceptance among institutions surveyed (e.g. night shelter, street kitchen, etc.). This can be learned by Brussels experiencing the "new policy" (see Figure 3). But despite close cooperation with politics, administration and the aid system from the beginning of the city count, empirically verified results can meet with rejection from political decision-makers, as the 2018 Basel homelessness count shows (Drilling *et al*., 2019).

A number of practical reasons can be argued in favour of cooperation with local government, politicians and administration: Planning and implementation of a city count together with politics and administration generates expertise, facilitates access to the field, supports the implementation process of the count and provides information on attitudes and resistance at the political decision-making level. Explicit as well as implicit knowledge of the local assistance infrastructure, its logic and practice is crucial for the whole study, beginning with the choice of method and ending with the interpretation and dissemination of the results. For a city count or other local studies about homelessness, for the interpretation of the results and the recommendations for action, it is extremely important, whether the assistance system follows, prefers or plans to develop a 'linear residential treatment' model or a 'housing first' model (Quilgars and Pleace, 2016). Such information and considerations can easily be obtained through the political and administrative channels. What qualities do city counts need in order to find a political hearing that is in accordance with the demands made by the researchers? In order to fulfil the narrow degree between cooperation with politics and meeting the scientific and professional requirements, various considerations are appropriate.

The risk of instrumentalisation and manipulation by political actors increase if a city count is established. This is why an institutional embedding and establishment of the study is so important. Experiences in different European cities (e.g. Dublin, Brussels) show, that a city count established on a legal basis and financed in the long term are good conditions to support professional cooperation between study makers, politicians and other actors and stakeholders involved in the count.

Figure 3: How data influence politics: the case of an NGO in Brussels

Part of the new policy (2014-2019) and the reorganization of the homeless sector in the Brussels region, is the dissolution of the non-profit organization la Strada, Support centre for the homeless sector in May 2019. The mission of data collection on homelessness, analysis and research is assigned to a new regional public institution Bruss'Help. Important here is the shifting of the focus of the data collection from extent to trajectories of homeless people who make use of the official service providers, to analyze the causes of homelessness in order to devise a preventive approach.

However, successive counts indicate that with each edition the proportion of people staying the night of the city count in these (emergency) shelters and temporary accommodation decreases (from almost 60% in 2008 to less than 40% in 2016)[2]. There is a good chance that the diversity of the living situations of the homeless people in the Brussels Region will become underexposed.

The homeless sector welcomed some points (structural financing of day care and Housing First), but at the same time opposed certain innovations as one single entry gate and a centralized dispatching, and the prohibition of anonymous access to assistance with the introduction of a digital social file and data sharing between homeless and general service providers. The field workers fear for an uniformization of care and exclusion of the most vulnerable homeless people.

The strong opposition of the sector forced the policy makers to modify some minor aspects of the legal framework, delayed the reorganization and the creation of the new institution. The long transition period creates uncertainty within the sector and among the homeless. The impact on stakeholders and the results of the city count of 2018 are clear. Due to the lack of sufficiently experienced researchers, volunteers and partners, the methodology could not be applied rigorously and the territory for the street count was restricted. The underestimation of the number of homeless people who avoid the homeless services is therefore even greater than in the previous editions of the city count.

Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie. *Ordonnantie van 14 juni 2018 betreffende de noodhulp aan en de inschakeling van daklozen, Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie* [Joint Community Commission. Order of 14 June 2018 on emergency aid for and the integration of the homeless, Joint Community Commission]

[2] la Strada, *Telling van dak- en thuislozen in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest –november 2016/2017*, Brussel: Steunpunt Thuislozenzorg Brussel – la Strada, 2017 [*la Strada, Census of homeless people in the Brussels-Capital Region – November 2016/2017, Brussels: Steunpunt Thuislozenzorg Brussel – la Strada, 2017*]

Which research approaches and self-image of the people and institutions conducting city counts can ensure the quality of a city count? In the following, we outline a technocratic-oriented, a social-theory-driven and a justice- and human rights-oriented approach to city counts.

1. The *technocratic paradigm* follows pragmatic and feasibility-based considerations. The design and implementation of the study is based on personnel, technical and financial aspects. Pragmatic approaches give less emphasis to theories as it ignores theoretical framings. On the one hand, this reduces the quality of the study ignoring theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, a technocracy-based approach can also be an advantage for breaking up dogmas in disciplines and proceeding in a feasible and solution-oriented way.

2. It is often overlooked that behind empirical research, which includes counting and measuring homelessness, there are *theory-based concepts*. Regardless of whether the research process is linear or circular-cascade, theory is incorporated into the whole and entire empirical research process (Outhwaite and Turner, 2007). Social theory enriches the process to learn more about the phenomena of homelessness, to formulate and test hypotheses of the causes for and consequences of homelessness. Theory-based priorities can support further development of measures. This includes theories on needs and vulnerability, social inclusion and social integration, prevention of homelessness and also the effectiveness of existing assistance. Translating such theories into city counts is challenging, but important in terms of the output they can generate not only for scientific community but also for policy and practice. Finally yet importantly, theory driven counts protect the autonomy of academics and professionalism from political interests.

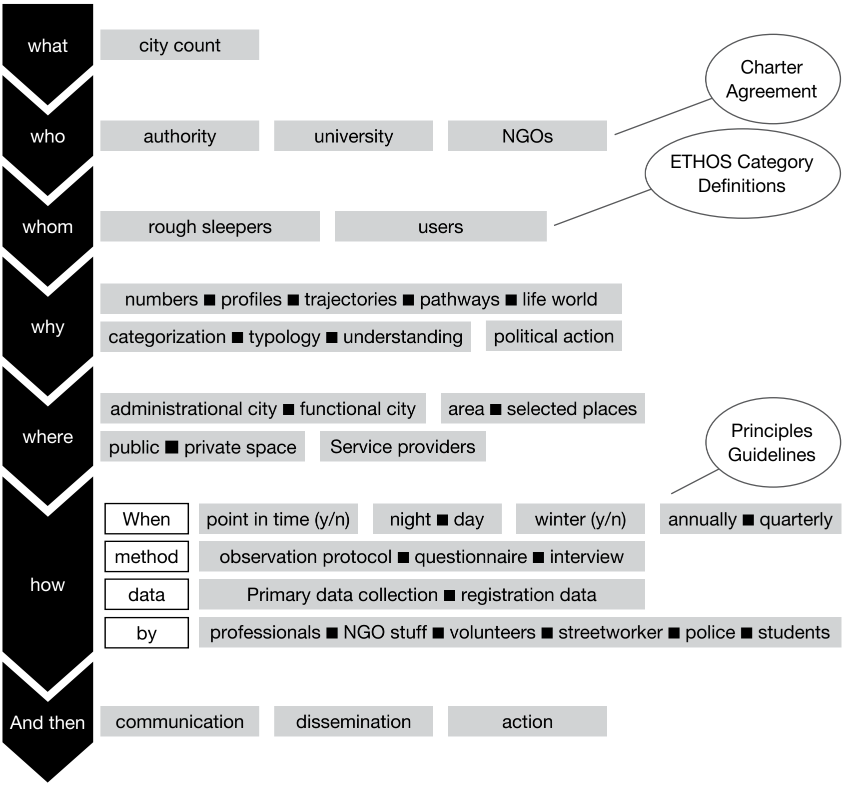
3. A third focus is based on *justice and human rights*. Social work scientists often favour such a normative mission. A justice and human rights based approach refers to the fundamental perspective that the city counts stand not for themselves. The rationale of the count is the person behind the numbers. It is about empirically based proposals for changes in assistance, so that human rights are respected, elementary needs linked to housing can be met (health, safety, protection and intimacy), perspectives for those affected are created and a just coexistence is opened up. In accordance for example, with capability approach (Sen, 1999), social factors and individual potential interact in such a way that homeless people's chances of achieving a good life increase.

The function of city counts vary between politicians, scientists, practitioners, and homeless people. Politicians have recognised that scientifically based figures on homelessness produce high credibility in the population. High political relevance of data and city counts contains risks that can discredit a study, their implementation, results and interpretation, but also creates opportunities for such a study and its impact. To overcome this dilemma a concept of constructive cooperation and collaboration with political parties takes into account when the count is conceptualised, conducted and the results are disseminated. Although a political effect is desired with the tool of a city count, it is important to comply with scientific standards and principles, and the fundamental scientific criteria of validity, objectivity and reliability in measuring homelessness should be obtained. Social research has the obligation to stand up to all ideological and political considerations and to emphasise the independence of its claim to knowledge. Likewise, studies' authors need a clear commitment to scientific criteria, an openness to theory-based censuses, a critical but constructive attitude towards pragmatism, and a professional mission that the study should primarily serve homeless people.

Lessons Learned from City Counts – A Comparative Perspective

As explained in this paper, a universal strategy for planning and implementing a city count does not exist. Each city develops a tailor-made method using instruments based on local context. Despite that, there has been potential for some harmonisation and methodological soundness. Lessons and practices were identified from the experiences of the examined city counts (see Figure 3). From the experience of the authors, a city count is expected to ask specific questions that need to be discussed at the beginning of the project. After all, every answer to one of the questions has consequences for further planning. To sum up with some guiding experiences:

Figure 4: Towards a common understanding of a city count



Source: own research.

(1) A city count is a point in time and place head count or survey asking questions, or a combination of both. When choosing between the three options, the most far-reaching distinction is the database that is available prior to the city count. The different databases open up the entire methodological spectrum, ranging from the use of a wide variety of census data to the collection of one's own data.

(2) The conduct of city counts or studies on homelessness is not justified only by scientific reasoning. The interests of the various actors who commission, finance or otherwise support the study can remarkably influence such research.

(3) In terms of specifying who is counted, all city counts referred to the ETHOS or ETHOS Light typology of homelessness and housing exclusion. The use of the ETHOS-typology with a focus on the living situations helps to avoid being dragged into political discussions on administrative status to define homelessness.

(4) Despite hardly any mutual co-ordination, each of the presented city counts has its value added also from a broader perspective of potential future harmonisation. Basel might be inspiring for those cities which mainly face hidden homelessness. Budapest is unique for its longitudinal experience, promoting the survey for two decades and spreading it to other cities in the country. Bratislava and Brussels have managed to establish a partnership of stakeholders which made it possible to collect the data on homelessness including rooflessness for the first time in the country and the city, and opened up space for further co-operation in ending homelessness.

(5) The choice of the survey area outlines consequences for the extent and structure of homelessness resulting from the choice of the survey date, the survey area and possible influences by actors.

(6) Data are the basis of a scientific based political action and the choice of method influences the outcome and the image of homelessness in a city. The data collected and analysed can enrich discourses on homelessness, change the previous agenda setting in the discourse on homelessness and the handling of social problems. Figures on homelessness can also clarify the situation and sensitise the population towards social problems.

(7) City counts are vulnerable to personal and political interests, claims and demands. Because figures on homelessness legitimise or question social policy decisions, they are susceptible to criticism and misinterpretation. The crucial question is how city counts can be carried out on a scientific basis despite their high political relevance?

(8) The research literature has provided a number of contributions on the advantages and disadvantages of different research designs and methods (Smith *et al*., 2019; HUD, 2020; The Innovation and Good Practice Team, 2020). The overall picture makes it clear: No golden standard on conducting a city count and measuring homelessness exists, and this has an impact on the political handling of data and findings from city counts and other studies on homelessness.

(9) If there is a high level of political public and media interest, it can be observed that the interpretation of the results made by them greatly differs from the results and interpretation of the people who implemented the study. Overall, a high political relevance of city counts not only creates opportunities for social change, but also contains risks that can discredit a study, their implementation, results and interpretation.

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Distorting Tendencies in Understanding Homelessness in Europe

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Abstract_ *In this paper, we summarise some of the recent developments within the social sciences in researching homelessness, in particular, the increasing use of longitudinal administrative and survey data, linking administrative and survey data, and the development of RCTS in evaluating interventions designed to assist those experiencing homelessness. Despite these methodological advances and innovations, cross-sectional research methods continue to be widely used, despite the long-standing identification of the limitations of this methodology for understanding homelessness, and this is particularly the case in medical research. We then explore some of the recent social science research on the links between the experience of homelessness and mental ill-health and substance misuse, which broadly concludes that the majority of people experiencing homelessness do not experience mental ill-health or substance misuse problems. We then provide case studies of medical research from Ireland, Germany, the UK, and Slovenia and argue that based on these case studies, such research continues to distort our understanding of homelessness and may inadvertently lead to ineffective policy responses that fail to resolve homelessness and demonstrate the limits of looking at the experience of homelessness in specific contexts and at specific times.*

Keywords_ *distorting tendencies in homelessness research, cross-section research, methodological innovations*

Introduction

In this contribution to the special edition on measuring homelessness in Europe, we focus our attention on the different methodologies that have been utilised to research those who are experiencing homelessness. In particular, we focus on how different methodological approaches and research traditions can generate divergent outcomes, for example, in terms of the respective balance of structural or personal factors in triggering episodes of homelessness, the duration of these episodes, and the implications of these divergent results for framing public policy responses. Over thirty years ago, Shinn and Weitzman (1990), when reviewing the research output on homelessness in the United States, observed that the existing research 'paid extensive attention to the characteristics of people who are homeless, especially in regard to their health and mental health status' (p.1). This extensive focus on the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness, they argued, risked 'diverting attention from the underlying causes and reinforcing stereotypes about the population group' (Shinn and Weitzman, 1990, p.2). Giving the example of mental illness, they argued that much of the existing research on homelessness and mental illness 'exaggerate the role of mental illness as a cause of homelessness' (Shinn and Weitzman, 1990, p.2; see also Shlay and Rossi, 1992, p.138 for a similar conclusion).

A number of years later, when Snow et al. (1994) published a review of contemporary research on homelessness in the US, they reiterated the conclusions of Shinn and Weitzman (1990) in observing that the bulk of the research literature portrayed the majority of those experiencing homelessness, particularly those literally homeless on the streets, as 'drunk, stoned, crazy or sick' (p.462). This portrayal of those experiencing homelessness was, they argued, distorted and flawed, resulting from the use of research methodologies and instruments that were unable to capture the dynamics and context of the experience of homelessness. Shinn (1992) conveyed a similar and sustained critique of the 'large and relentlessly negative literature on rates of substance abuse and psychiatric impairment among homeless people' (p.2). Cross-sectional research methods, which uncritically used the instruments of psychiatric diagnosis, neglect to contextualise the experience of homelessness and medicalise the social, were particularly singled out by Snow and colleagues as contributing to 'a truncated, decontextualized, and over pathologized picture of the homeless' (1994, p.468) (see also Phelan and Link, 1999). Some of this research was also used by advocates as a way of framing homelessness, 'as a way a garnering support for those experiencing homelessness as victimized by disease and dysfunction rather than the result of bad individual choices' (Lyon-Callo, 2000, p.330).

This critique of existing research by Snow and colleagues emerged from their ethnographic research on those experiencing literal homelessness in Austin, Texas, where the behaviour and actions of their informants did not tally with the results from the cross-sectional research. Rather than being struck by the pathology of those on the streets, they were struck by their 'normalcy' and that the disabilities observed were disabling contexts and situations rather than traits of the individuals encountered (Snow and Anderson, 1993, pp.314-315). Similar conclusions also were noted by other ethnographers such as Hopper (2003) and Rosenthal (1991). Thus, the research methods utilised to enumerate, characterise, and describe those experiencing homelessness vary significantly by method and design, with for example ethnographic methods providing a very different description of those experiencing homelessness than did cross-sectional methods.

In this paper, we summarise some of the recent developments in researching those experiencing homelessness, particularly the linking of administrative and survey data and the development of RCTS in evaluating interventions designed to assist those experiencing both long term forms of homelessness and families experiencing homelessness. Despite these methodological advances and innovations, cross-sectional research methods continue to be widely used, despite the long-standing identification of the limitations of this methodology for understanding homelessness, in that it was capturing the 'demographics and disabilities' of the minority 'long term homeless' population, but failing to adequately capture the majority of people who experienced homelessness over a period of time. We then explore some of the recent social science research on the links between the experience of homelessness and mental ill-health and substance misuse, which broadly concludes that the majority of people experiencing homelessness do not experience mental ill-health or substance misuse problems. We then provide case studies of medical research from Ireland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Slovenia and argue that, based on these case studies, such research continues to distort our understanding of homelessness and may inadvertently lead to ineffective policy responses that fail to resolve homelessness. In this next section we explore a number of recent trends in research on those experiencing homelessness and the implications of this for public policy.

Homelessness Research Strands and Policy Making

Snow et al. (2007) identified three key strands of contemporary homelessness research in the US. An ethnographic strand that explored, in the main, the experiences of the literally homeless and their 'strategies of survival'; a strand of macro-level multivariate research that aimed to understand the relationship between, for example, housing affordability, poverty, and rates of homelessness; and a strand, largely cross-sectional and quantitative, that surveyed the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness. Over a decade ago, in a review of evidence on homelessness in Europe, Busch-Geertsema et al. (2010, p.15) noted that

> Although a clearer consensus has developed over the past two decades amongst researchers on the causes of homelessness, this consensus is more at the ideological than at the empirical level. In other words, some of the new hypotheses about the nature of homelessness causation are difficult to entirely prove because there is still an absence of robust data on people experiencing homelessness. Considerable difficulties remain in demonstrating empirically how the confluence of adverse structural and individual factors may 'trigger' homelessness and how intervening variables, from welfare regimes to housing policy to policing policy to addiction treatment policy, contribute to patterns of homelessness across the EU.

There are also distinct research traditions in researching homelessness between North America and the UK, for example, where the bulk of research on homelessness published in English originates. Fitzpatrick and Christian (2006) noted the dominance of increasingly sophisticated quantitative research methodologies in the US, with qualitative methodologies dominating in the UK, with a broadly similar picture in other European countries (Edgar et al., 2003). In disciplinary terms, community psychology has had a particularly significant contribution to homelessness research in North America (Hanson and Toro, 2020), as has economics (O'Flaherty, 2019), and sociological and medical perspectives (Culhane et al., 2020). But this is less so in Europe, with the disciplines of housing studies and social policy to the fore (Christian, 2003; Tosi, 2010), although, in recent years, community psychologists have been prominent in evaluating Housing First projects in Europe (see for example, Aubry et al., 2018).

Developments in research methodologies and design, disciplinary synergies, and new data sources are allowing for greater clarity and nuance in understanding the 'triggers' that result in some households experiencing homelessness. In addition to research strands noted above, we can also add a burgeoning qualitative strand in which a 'pathways' approach to analysing trajectories through homelessness has been particularly influential (Clapham, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2008, Wagner, 2018). The use of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), particularly in the evaluation of the efficacy of Housing First approaches (Goering et al., 2011), but also family homelessness (Gubits et al., 2018), is another notable development. As is a strand of research that has made an enormously productive use of utilising linked longitudinal administrative data from homeless and other social, health, and criminal justice services (Culhane, 2016; Benjaminsen, 2016), and combining data sets from various household surveys (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Linking longitudinal panel surveys with administrative data, in the case of Journeys Home in Australia (Wooden et al., 2012; Herault and Johnson, 2016), has ‘answered old questions that had never been approached satisfactorily before, [and] raised some new questions that had been impossible to think about before’ (O’Flaherty, 2019, p.4). Finally, both comparative cross-national and national studies of policy responses to those experiencing homeless have demonstrated that both preventing households experiencing homelessness and exiting those households currently experiencing homelessness is possible when public policy focuses on the provision of secure housing rather than shelters as the primary response (Allen et al., 2020; Aubry et al., 2021; O’Regan et al, 2021; Shinn and Khadduri, 2020; Stephens et al., 2010).

A number of authors have critiqued social science research on homelessness suggested that research on homelessness should be ‘unruly’, unsettling ‘the objectifying lens so often applied to those whom academics take as their research objects’ (Farrugia and Gerrard, 2016, p.280); it should be disruptive, bold, and innovative (Lancione, 2016, p.164), and criticized for ‘asking only limited questions’ around the management of homelessness (Willse, 2015, p.182). Others have argued Pleace (2016a) that the evidence base in respect of understanding homelessness ‘has undergone radical change in the last 25 years’ (p.26) and this research base has had positive impact on policy. Equally, O’Flaherty (2019, p.23), while noting the significant gaps in our knowledge on various aspects of homelessness, concludes in his review of the economic literature on homelessness ‘we have learned a lot.’

Methodological advances in researching the experience and, more significantly, the dynamics of homelessness, has led in a number of cases to evidence-based policy shifts in responding to homelessness, particularly in the case of adopting Housing First (Nelson et al., 2021; O’Sullivan et al., 2021). However, not to the degree that might be expected given the methodological advances described above, and in the case of the findings from Journeys Home data in Australia, O’Flaherty (2019, p.5) caustically notes that ‘policy-makers do not seem to be clamouring to acquire this information and be guided by it.’ Parsell (2017, p.134) convincingly argues that households continue to experience homelessness ‘not because we lack the scientific knowledge but rather because of our values and the political decisions we make.’

In brief, we argue that over the past 20 years or so, our understanding of the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness and solutions to homelessness has been shaped by increasingly sophisticated methodological approaches and designs. In particular, qualitive and ethnographic work that has provided valuable contextualisation and the use of longitudinal administrative and survey data, in addition to randomised control trials, has been used to more fully understand entries to and exits from homelessness.

Our critique in this paper focuses on research on 'homelessness' that remains grounded in cross-sectional research designs. Such approaches are framed by images of homelessness as an issue that primarily involves street-dwelling, lone men presenting with severe mental illness and substance use problems. We argue that these working assumptions on how homelessness is *understood* (Pleace, 2016a) influence how interventions among people experiencing homelessness are defined, operationalised, and evaluated. The ways in which homelessness is often counted, both in terms of where it is looked for and the expectation of what will be found, i.e., the validity of methods is not questioned because the results correspond with a predefined image of what 'homelessness' is, also influence these policies.

Lessons Learned: Time, Dynamics, Place, Definition and Policy

Point-prevalence or point-in time surveys of those experiencing homelessness are widely used to determine the number of people experiencing homelessness as well as their characteristics. As Shinn and Khadduri (2020) acknowledge, this method can be useful for monitoring trends and identifying service needs, but minimises the scale of homelessness, and period-prevalence surveys are required to more accurately estimate the number of people who experience homelessness over a time period. Shinn and Khadduri argue that *time-frames* (2020, pp.26-27) are also important in researching those who experience homelessness as the numbers who experience homelessness *and* their characteristics will differ significantly depending on the time-frame used. Shorter time-frames largely capture those experiencing long term homelessness with longer time-frames capturing the significantly larger number of people who enter and exit homelessness each year. For example, Link et al. (1994) found that the life-time prevalence of homelessness was 7.4% in comparison to 3.1% over a five-year period. A recent study utilising a similar methodology in eight European Countries found a lifetime prevalence of nearly 5%, albeit with significant variations by country, with a 5-year prevalence of just under 2% (Taylor et al., 2019).

Time-frames are also important in understanding both the experience of homelessness and pathways to and exits from homelessness. Further, they matter in for example, how levels of psychological distress vary whether you are entering, experiencing, or exiting homelessness, whether you are male or female, as well as in enumerating homelessness (Johnson and Scutella, 2018). Homelessness is a dynamic process and capturing the experience of homelessness at a point in time does not reveal the fluidity of the experience of homelessness and that the majority who experience a spell in an emergency shelter, for example, will exit to housing and stay housed (Lee et al., 2021). This was demonstrated when an increasing number of researchers from the 1990s onward, initially almost exclusively in North America, and subsequently in a number of European countries and Australia, utilising longitudinal research methods were showing very different patterns of homelessness than that found in cross-sectional research, with profound implications for policy (Dworsky and Piliavin, 2000; Kuhn and Culhane, 1998; Klodawsky et al., 2007; Shinn, 1997). The importance of subsidised housing, poverty, and other structural factors in contributing to homelessness rather than individual level dysfunctions came to the fore, with 'residential instability' rather than prolonged experiences of homelessness the typical pattern observed (Sosin et al., 1990, p.171).

Where research on those experiencing homelessness takes place also matters. Research that surveys only those experiencing street homelessness or those using designated services and shelters for the 'homeless', will influence how we think about and respond to homelessness. Focusing on these places only will fail to adequately capture, for example, women's experience of homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2016; Pleace, 2016b, Bretherton and Mayock, 2021), and those who are experiencing transitional forms of homelessness. Cloke et al. (2001) argue that a preoccupation with measuring people experiencing street homelessness in England has resulted in the 'concept, image and number of rough sleepers which has been used as the popular defining representation of homelessness' (p.260), and as a consequence of this focus on people experiencing street homelessness, it 'serves to distort popular appreciations of the scale, profile and location of homelessness in the UK. (p.260)' When the focus of research shifts beyond people experiencing street homelessness and/or in emergency accommodation, women for example, appear in greater numbers. In addition, there are limitations to 'utilisation-based' sources as those that do not utilise services will not be included (Culhane et al., 2020). Based on data from Philadelphia, including those experiencing homelessness but not utilising services would increase not only the size of the population experiencing homelessness, but also alter the race and disability profile of those experiencing homelessness as the non-users were more likely to be white and had lower levels of disability (Metraux et al., 2016).

Also important are the *questions we ask* in doing research. For example, administrative in-take data in Dublin on the 'reasons' why families required emergency accommodated simply asked about their last stable home. Just over 40% cited 'family circumstances' and 50% cited the housing market (Dublin Region Homeless Executive, 2019). However, in a separate piece of work, when asked about their last four accommodations rather than just their last, the role of the housing market, particularly terminations of tenancy or rent increases in the private rented sector, became more pronounced and exiting the family home due to inter-personal difficulties was often the final stage in a process of residential dislocations, primarily in the private rented housing market (Gambi and Sheridan, 2020).

Understanding family homelessness as arising from dysfunctional families would suggest a set of policy responses very different from understanding family homelessness as resulting from the dysfunctions of the housing market. Because the perception was that family homelessness was a consequence of family dysfunction, the policy response was the establishment of congregate transitional accommodation units, known as Family Hubs in late 2016, and by 2020 there were over 30 such facilities across the country at a projected revenue cost of over €25m for 2020 (O'Sullivan, 2020). The development of these Hubs was not underpinned by any evidence as to their efficacy and the research evidence is clear that both long and short term housing subsidies are considerably less costly than emergency accommodation or transitional congregate facilities for families, while also offering substantial additional benefits across a range of psycho-social domains, particularly for the children (O'Sullivan, 2017; Gubits et al., 2018). A similar response to family homelessness was evident from the 1990s in the US where it was assumed that mothers with children experiencing homelessness required service intensive shelter facilities to prepare them for housing due to their elevated levels of mental distress and depression. This was despite research strongly arguing that 'homeless mothers are an unexceptional subset of impoverished mothers and that there are no systematic psychological differences that predispose them to homelessness' (Bogard et al., 1999, p.54; see also Gerstal, 1996) and that homelessness was more likely to cause depression rather than depression causing homelessness.

Furthermore, *scale matters*. For example, by recent estimates, England, which has a total population of some 56 million, has measured its homeless population at any one point (in pre-pandemic circumstances) at nearly 300 000 (Shelter, 2019; Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Much of this homelessness was among families, often led by lone women parents in which rates of mental illness do not exceed those found in the general population. By contrast, some 385 000 people had a psychotic disorder (severe mental illness, 0.7% of the population), 2.97 million people (5.4%) report suicidal thoughts and acts of self-harm, and around 2% of adults are screened as having bi-polar disorder (around 1.1 million people). When surveyed, one in six adults in England report 'depression or anxiety' over the course of the last week (Baker, 2020). Beyond evidence that mental health problems may sometimes develop after homelessness, indeed in response to homelessness, the idea that mental health problems are a causal factor, or a 'characteristic' that defines homelessness, falls over very quickly in this context. Rather than drawing an association from the prevalence of severe mental illness derived from oversampling people experiencing homelessness for sustained periods, medical researchers might instead ask why such a *small* proportion of people with a mental health problem experience homelessness.

Finally, who we *define* as experiencing homelessness matters. The work of Link and colleagues noted above has shown that both 5 year and life-time prevalence of homelessness increases significantly if you include those in insecure accommodation and involuntarily doubling up, rather than simply those experiencing street and emergency shelter forms of homelessness. Definitions of homelessness also shape how we understand homelessness, with broad definitions finding strong evidence for structural causes of homelessness, with more narrow definitions noting the dysfunctions of the individuals experiencing this relatively rare form of homelessness (Pleace and Hermans, 2020). A striking feature of the bulk of research on homelessness over the past 50 years is the degree to which the research has focused on these relatively rare experiences of homelessness. Analyses of time-series data on shelter admissions in New York and Philadelphia by Kuhn and Culhane (1998) showed a clear pattern whereby approximately 80% of shelter users were transitional users, in that they used shelters for very short periods of time or a single episode and did not return to homelessness. A further 10% were episodic users of shelters, and the remaining 10% were termed long term users of shelter services.

The pattern of shelter use first identified by Kuhn and Culhane (1998) has been replicated in similar analyses of longitudinal administrative data in a number of other cities and countries of the Global North, albeit with some significant differences in the extent of homelessness and the characteristics of those in each cluster in different welfare regimes. For example, Benjaminsen and Andrade (2015) found support in the case of Denmark for the thesis first articulated by Fitzpatrick (1998; see also Stephens and Fitzpatrick, 2007) that in generous and comprehensive welfare regimes, the number of people experiencing homelessness will be low, but the majority will have complex needs, whereas in miserly and rationing regimes, the numbers experiencing homelessness will be high, but only a minority will have complex needs. Equating those experiencing long-term or entrenched forms of homelessness' with 'homelessness' has distorted how policymakers, politicians, and the public understand and respond to homelessness, and this distortion has resulted in policies that fail to address the dynamics and types of homelessness.

In brief, it is clear that there are a variety of experiences of homelessness rather than a singular experience, but research that primarily researched those in emergency shelters or literally homeless, and did so at a point-in-time, neglected the temporal dimension of the experience of homelessness. The dynamics of homelessness have also been underestimated, with the majority of people who experience homelessness exiting and not returning to homelessness, however broadly or narrowly homelessness is defined. In part, this static, reductionist, individualised understanding of homelessness shaped public policy responses. This is seen in the growth of emergency shelters for both families and adult only households in the majority of the countries of the Global North from the 1980s onwards.

Mental Health, Problematic Substance Use and Homelessness

Public opinion supports a view that homelessness – usually understood as literal homelessness – is the preserve of largely single male adults, often with mental ill-health and/or alcohol/substance misuse problems (Batterham, 2020). However, as discussed above, this view is at odds with the social science research on homelessness in the Global North, but it does resonate with much of the medical research on the characteristics of those who experience homelessness. Snow et al. (1986, p.408) noted in their review that 'it would appear that the modal type among the homeless today is an interactionally incompetent, conversationally incoherent, occasionally menacing, and institutionally-dependent "crazy."' They argue that '[s]uch a root image or characterization is not merely a media creation. It has substantial footing in a spate of research conducted primarily by psychiatrically-oriented investigators.' When corrected for the 'diagnostic biases' in much of this research, they argue that 'the modal type among the homeless is a psychiatrically non-impaired individual trapped in a cycle of low-paying, dead-end jobs which fail to provide the financial wherewithal to get off and stay off the streets' (Snow et al. 1986, p.421).

This strand of medical research remains prevalent. In a review of studies exploring the 'prevalence of mental disorders amongst the homeless in Western Europe', (Fazel et al., 2008, p.1670) concluded that '[h]omeless people in Western countries are substantially more likely to have alcohol and drug dependence than the age- matched general population in those countries, and the prevalence of psychotic illnesses and personality disorders are higher.' A further review of the health status of people experiencing homelessness in high income countries claimed that '[h]omeless people have higher rates of premature mortality than the rest of the population, especially from suicide and unintentional injuries, and an increased prevalence of a range of infectious diseases, mental disorders, and substance misuse' (Fazel et al., 2014, p.1529). More recently, an evidence review of drug treatment services for people who are homeless and using drugs claimed that people experiencing homelessness 'tend to have worse physical and mental health, and are more likely to report problem substance use, than the general population' (Miler et al., 2021, p.9).

In the case of homelessness and substance misuse, Johnson and Chamberlin (2008) observe that, despite popular opinion regularly citing substance misuse as a cause of homelessness, their detailed large-scale research of two inner city homelessness services in Melbourne showed that only 15% had substance misuse problems prior to entering homelessness services for the first time. This early finding has been validated in Australia by more recent work using the comparatively, unusually robust, Journeys Home dataset (McVicar et al., 2015; McVicar et al., 2019). O'Flaherty (2019) has noted that both the Journeys Home data and the

North American RCTs confirm that 'because substance misuse for the most part does not cause homelessness, treatment of substance abuse is neither necessary nor sufficient for ending homelessness' (p.5).

Johnson and Chamberlain (2011) also explored the relationship between mental illness and homelessness using the same dataset from Melbourne and demonstrate that it is 'inaccurate to claim that most of the homeless are mentally ill, or that mental illness is the primary cause of homelessness' (p.44). As with their research on homelessness and substance misuse, their finding on homelessness and mental illness is confirmed by analyses of the Journeys Home data (Moschion and van Ours, 2020). In the US, research identified the difficulty of distinguishing between the symptoms of mental illness and behaviours that reflected an adaptation to living in public spaces or congregate shelters, thus potentially leading to bias in attributing homelessness to mental ill health due to inadequate diagnostic assessments. Claims of high rates of mental illness among those experiencing homelessness arose from the limitations of the predominantly cross-sectional methodology, and 'confounded the understanding of those who became homeless with those who *remained* homeless' (Montgomery et al., 2013, p.64, author's emphasis). Montgomery et al. (2013) concluded that 'the research supports there being nothing inherent to serious mental illness that leads to homelessness, rather this link is mitigated by the economic difficulties that often accompany living with mental illness in the community' (p.68). More recent analyses from the methodologically robust Australian Journeys home data also supports this analysis with the authors concluding that 'mental health issues are unlikely to be the main cause of homelessness' (Moschion and van Ours, 2020, p.12).

In the next section we explore a number of case studies of research that have proved influential, but due to the methodologies employed, have contributed to distorting our understanding of homelessness.

Ireland

Medical research on homelessness in Ireland, and particularly in Dublin, have stressed the disabilities of those experiencing homelessness. For example, Ni Cheallaigh et al. (2017) state that '[i]n Dublin, homelessness is strongly associated with drug use: up to 70% of homeless individuals report having used illegal drugs with over half reporting injecting drugs.' O'Carroll and Wainwright (2019, p.1) note that '[h]omeless people also have high rates of mental-ill health with high rates of schizophrenia, depression and anxiety. This increased mental illness burden has resulted in higher suicide rates. People experiencing homelessness also have much higher rates of alcohol and substance use disorders than the general population. Irish studies have found similar high rates of addiction, poor physical and mental health.' For Moloney et al. (2021, p.1.) 'it is well documented that homeless people have greater health needs than the general population, including a higher prevalence of severe psychiatric illness with complex needs.' Equally, Glynn et al. (2017) state that '[i]t is clear, therefore, that a substantial proportion of people who are homeless in Ireland today have ended up – and remain – in that position because of ill-health and addiction.'

These stark conclusions and broad consensus that the majority of those experiencing homelessness in Dublin are afflicted by various forms of ill-health and substance misuse arise from four influential studies of shelter users primarily in Dublin conducted between 1997 and 2013. In these studies, the methodologies were cross-sectional, questionnaire-based surveys of those residing in emergency shelters, both private and NGO operated, and those accessing street-based outreach health services. These studies were conducted in 1997 (Holohan, 1997), 2005 (O'Carroll and O'Reilly, 2008), 2011 (Keogh et al., 2015) and 2013 (O'Reilly et al., 2015) with sample sizes ranging from 105 to 601. Approximately one-quarter of those in the 2011 survey were deemed at risk of homelessness rather than living in emergency accommodation or experiencing literal homelessness, and only the 2005 survey included those accessing street based outreach health services.

O'Reilly et al. (2015), based on their cross-sectional, questionnaire-based survey of 578 users of various types of temporary and emergency accommodation in Dublin and Limerick and 23 people experiencing street homelessness in Dublin, concluded that the 'results show a predominantly male, Irish Roman Catholic homeless population….Family problems and drugs and alcohol addiction featured heavily as self-reported reasons for homelessness. Homelessness was often long term….There was a disproportionate number in the sample who had been in care as a child' (p.9).

In contrast, research utilising longitudinal administrative data in Dublin showed that 12 734 unique individuals utilised emergency shelters in Dublin between 2012 and 2016 (Waldron et al., 2019). The majority, 9 915 or 78%, were in the transitional category in that they had short term stays, with 1-2 experiences of staying in emergency accommodation over this period and 75% having one episode only over this period; results that align with comparable research in a number of other countries as noted earlier. Those in the long term cluster accounted for just over 12% of total users over this period. Between 2017 and 2020, a further 12 500 unique adults entered emergency accommodation in Dublin for the first time. If the pattern identified between 2012 and 2016 applied between 2017 and 2020, some 22 500 adults are likely to have experienced a transitional stay in emergency accommodation between 2012 and 2020, in comparison to the 3 000 who are likely to have experienced a more long term experience use of emergency accommodation. Those in the long term category are largely those surveyed in the four cross-sectional reports cited above and based on the characteristics of those in this category from other countries. This considered, the results of the surveys are not particularly surprising.

However, as a consequence of the research design, the majority of adults who experienced a stay in emergency accommodation in Dublin in recent years will not be captured in cross-sectional surveys, and for this group, again based on what we know of characteristics of this category in other liberal welfare regimes, the primary reason for experiencing a stay in emergency accommodation is an inadequate supply of affordable housing coupled with a 'shock' (economic or personal, such as the loss of employment or break up of a relationship).

Thus, homelessness in Dublin *is not strongly* associated with high rates of substance use or mental ill-health. For those experiencing long term forms of homelessness this is more likely to be the case, and hence understanding the needs of this group is crucial to developing an adequate response, but their needs cannot be attributed to all those who experience homelessness. Using longitudinal administrative data rather than cross-sectional data show very different patterns, dynamics, and characteristics of those experiencing homelessness, and the policy consequences that stem for these divergent conclusions are significant. Basing policy responses on the administrative data would, for example, suggest increasing the supply of affordable housing, ensuring people exit emergency accommodation as soon as possible, and not utilise emergency accommodation as an alternative to affordable housing. On the other hand, basing policy on the cross-sectional data would suggest providing enhanced substance misuse treatment services, more extensive mental health services and other treatment interventions, and a graduated services of accommodation services that assist those individuals to manage their addictions and trauma.

Germany

In Germany a large medical study was published in 2017 about mental health problems of people experiencing homelessness called the SEEWOLF study (Bäuml et al., 2017). One of the most prominent results was that 93% of the sample analysed had a diagnosis of mental illness at some point in their entire life and 74% had an acute mental illness in need of treatment during the preceding month. The results were widely distributed even years in advance of the publication of the book through press releases and reports by prominent magazines and newspapers. Main headlines were 'Many roofless people suffer from mental dysfunctions' (Spiegel online, 2014), "Many homeless people are mentally ill" (Ärzteblattt, July 2014), etc.

Looking in more detail at the study (once it was published), the sample focused exclusively on single people experiencing homelessness who used particular hostels for specific groups of single individuals experiencing homelessness in Munich.

Families experiencing were completely excluded from the sample as were other groups of people experiencing homelessness (including those experiencing street homelessness). About half of the whole sample was recruited from institutions where it is a requisite to have a serious mental health problem in order to get access to these institutions. The average duration of homelessness in this sample was as high as 61.3 months, i.e., more than five years. Thus, the results of this very influential study arrive from a highly selective sample which is in no way representative of 'people experiencing homelessness', neither in Munich nor in Germany. However, it is quoted repeatedly with reference to the total number of persons estimated as homeless in Germany (for further details see Busch-Geertsema, 2018).

Recommendations of the study called for more enforced treatment and for a massive 'transfer' of the large majority of people experiencing homelessness into 'institutionalised psychiatry'. Housing First was not presented as an option despite a large international literature review and the fact that Housing First has been developed predominantly for mentally ill people experiencing homelessness.

It is probable that in Germany people with a mental illness, especially if they try to avoid medical treatment, have a higher risk of becoming homeless than the general population. But it is also important to keep in mind that most mentally ill people are not homeless and life in regular, permanent housing. While we still lack reliable studies on the overall prevalence of mental illness among all people experiencing homelessness in Germany, it seems reasonable to assume that the proportions are much smaller than that found in the Munich study.

UK

The UK saw a shift in the administrative and political perception of homelessness as the experience of homelessness among families started to be interpreted as systemic causation. From the 1960s onwards, homelessness was increasingly seen as being generated by inequality, housing market failure, and weaknesses in social protection systems (Greve et al., 1971). The collection of data from the English 1977 homelessness legislation, which focused on family homelessness and 'vulnerable' adults, showed a population that matched this picture. Homelessness had primarily social and economic causation among people whose chief characteristic was poverty and precarity.

It remains the case, for example, that a significant amount of UK homelessness is triggered by domestic abuse. What is called 'family homelessness' is predominantly lone women parents who have often experienced domestic abuse and who are characterised by poverty and precarity. Homelessness, according to administrative systems, is also quite frequently triggered by an eviction from a private rented sector tenancy. These numbers are much higher than for people whose homelessness is associated with mental illness and dwarf the numbers experiencing street homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019).

However, much of the British medical research on homelessness has followed the global trend to use what is essentially a cultural or mass media 'definition' of homelessness. This is within a broader context in which portrayals of homelessness have been driven by successive governments wishing to emphasise individual pathology in causation (Anderson, 1993). Cross-sectional studies therefore often report astronomical levels of substance misuse problems, mental, and physical illness.

Again, 'homelessness' means a static population of people experiencing street homelessness and shelter users who can be reliably sampled using cross-sectional methods. For example, a paper from 2012 notes 'rates of traumatic brain injury are much higher among the homeless population than in the general population and that sustaining a traumatic brain injury may be a risk factor for homelessness' (Oddy et al., 2012, p.1058). The study was based on a small, cross-sectional sample of long term and repeatedly homeless lone adults; leading to the reporting of brain injury as present in 48% of homeless adults. Another paper from 2017 talks of 'in the presence of physiological stresses arising from exposure *to harsh environmental conditions*, the absence of a nutritionally balanced diet is likely to have a detrimental impact on the health of a homeless individual' (Fallaize et al., 2017, p.707, author's emphasis).

UK health and homelessness literature often works on the basis that people experiencing homelessness live on the streets and homelessness services. Families who are homeless are often placed in temporary accommodation, they are not in homelessness services or on the street, and women who are homeless due to domestic abuse and living in refuges are not counted (Bretherton, 2017). At the time of writing, the UK has had relative success in keeping levels of COVID-19 infection down among people experiencing homelessness, a success reported in the following terms by medical researchers:

> In this first wave of SARS-CoV-2 infections in England, we estimated that the preventive measures imposed might have avoided 21 092 infections (19 777–22 147), 266 deaths (226–301), 1 164 hospital admissions (1 079–1 254), and 338 ICU admissions (305–374) among the homeless population. (Lewer et al., 2020, p.1183)

The population being referred to in this study is referred to as '46 565 individuals experiencing homelessness' at one point there is a note that there are different types of homelessness, but note the language in the quote above, 'among *the* homeless population' (Lewer et al., 2020, author's emphasis). In the third quarter of 2020, government statistics recorded 93 490 statutorily homeless households placed in temporary accommodation by local authorities in England, containing 59 360 adults and 120 570 children. This population, not living on the streets or within homelessness services that were designed for lone homeless adults, were simply outside the operating assumption, the *image* of what the homeless population was.[1]

Slovenia

Slovenia presents a case where cross-sectional research methods have mainly been used to study homelessness, though still rather scarcely. One of the most important studies is that of Dekleva and Razpotnika (2007) that focused only on people experiencing homelessness using (selected) services for the homeless in Ljubljana; they used a narrow definition of homelessness, i.e. those experiencing street homelessness or in shelters and basements and had no home of their own. The small sample of 107 people also limits detailed analysis. Their results showed that they included a high proportion of very long term people experiencing homelessness, 21% of the sample was homeless for more than 10 years, with more than half being homeless more than two years. Additionally, 85% of the sample were men and a high share of interviewees had occasionally or regularly used alcohol (61%) and drugs (40%).

A similar approach to the one described above was taken in a study of the health and access to health care of people experiencing homelessness (Razpotnik and Dekleva 2009). The study included 122 people from various Slovene cities, and selection was a non-random sample of self-defined people experiencing homelessness – i.e. those sleeping outside, in basements, shelters, and other accommodations for homeless, and who had no place to go or were threatened by eviction. Similarly, as in the previous survey, 84% were men. Among respondents, 34% had alcohol use disorder, 26% substance use disorder, several listed health problems, and 16% also reported substance overdose.

These studies have focused on a specific subgroup – males that have experienced long term homelessness and reconfirm the problems of cross-sectional studies and focused samples based on users of shelters and those experiencing street homelessness for understanding homelessness. It reinforces the narrow view of the homeless population, overemphasising their health issues, problematic alcohol and substance use, as well as portraying the population as mainly male. However, in a research vacuum that exists in Slovenia, we might argue that such research is important for bringing the problem into policy attention and improving national understanding of the issue. However, it also reinforces the placement of the issue

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1 Source: MHCLG (2021) https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

into the social problems arena and not housing problems. It is therefore not surprising that homelessness in Slovenia is mentioned mainly within social protection and social inclusion policy documents, but has almost no presence in housing policy (see Filipovič Hrast, 2019).

A broader study on homelessness done a decade ago (Dekleva et al., 2010) encompassed homelessness in a more comprehensive way and followed the ETHOS typology. Due to the lack of original data, and the limited existing official data, only some information on specific subcategories was available – such as number of users of homeless services, users of women's shelters, and people with specific housing problems. However, no data was available on the demographic profile of these groups, so no comprehensive additional knowledge about the characteristics of this population was gathered.

The research on homelessness enables development of policy measures as well as enables placement of the issue on the public as well as political agenda (see Lux, 2014; Hermans, 2017; Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016). The lack of research into homelessness has been identified as an important drawback in the development of more comprehensive policies in this area in Slovenia (see Filipovič Hrast, 2019). However, as stated above, it is important to research not only specific population groups and users of services in cross-sectional studies, as this distorts the issue and reconfirms the established narrower approach for addressing it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, within the social sciences, consistent evidence demonstrates that the majority of those experiencing homelessness experience short term episodes, and that only a minority experience entrenched or long term homelessness. Those with complex needs can be successfully housed without having to be 'prepared for housing', rather what is required is support *in* housing to maintain their tenancy. Cross-sectional research, particularly in the health domain, continues to be used extensively, contributing to some of the enduring myths of contemporary homelessness, particularly that those experiencing homelessness have elevated rates of mental ill-health and substance misuse than the general public. In turn, high rates of mental ill-health and substance misuse also explain *why* people are experiencing homelessness, thus contributing to the understanding of the enormous complexity of responding effectively to their needs and explaining the stubbornly high numbers of people experiencing homelessness, despite the best efforts of government and civil society.

A focus on both emergency accommodation and literal homelessness, allied to the inability of cross-sectional research to uncover the dynamics of homelessness, resulted in a misleading picture of those experiencing homelessness as being largely single males with a range of disabilities, rather than a relatively heterogeneous population in terms of gender, disabilities, and duration of homelessness. It failed to grasp that the majority of people who experienced homelessness exited from homelessness relatively quickly, requiring little social support in doing so, and did not return to homelessness.

How we research homelessness has important implications for public policy. As noted from the case studies and the wider literature, the idea that homelessness is caused by mental-ill health and or substance misuse is not untrue, but only applies to a minority of those experiencing homelessness rather than the majority as suggested by much of the cross-sectional research. Even for the minority of those experiencing homelessness who do have mental ill-health and substance misuse problems, the evidence is that resolving their homelessness does not require treatment prior to housing, rather it is best resolved in a home of their own.

Despite the significant methodological and theoretical advances in understanding the dimensions and dynamics of homelessness in Europe, and the inadequacy of cross-sectional research methods to understand homelessness, this method of researching homelessness continues to be extensively used in medical research in particular, resulting in significant distortions. The significance of these distortions for public policy should not be underestimated. If public policies responding to homelessness are to be evidence based, the robustness of the methodologies underpinning the evidence is crucial, and flawed methodologies are likely to generate flawed data, and may translate into flawed policies.

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Measurement of Homelessness in the Nordic Countries

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Abstract_ *The four Nordic countries, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden all have long time series data on homelessness, which is more or less comparable between the countries. The data is gathered through particular homelessness censuses ('counts') using methods developed for the purpose. The four countries initiated the counts at different times, Finland as the first in 1987 and the latest, Denmark, in 2007. Despite some national differences, the definitions and methods are widely similar. In all four countries, the definition of homelessness encompasses not only rough sleepers and shelter users but also people staying temporarily with family and friends. This is also reflected in the methodology of the counts as they draw not only upon homeless services but include wider parts of the welfare system into the data collection. However, one notable difference is that Denmark, Norway and Sweden collect substantially more information about homeless individuals than Finland, thus allowing for identifying particular sub-groups within the homeless population. In Finland and Sweden the data collection is carried out by state agencies, while in Denmark and Norway the data collection is conducted by research institutes. In Norway the first count was initiated by researchers, however the definition of homelessness and the methodology was almost a duplicate of the state-initiated count conducted in Sweden. Regardless of origin, and which agencies carry out the registration, these registrations and the numbers they produce are vital tools for the respective governments' steering of the homeless policy.*

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Introduction

The Nordic countries generally have low levels of poverty and social inequality in international comparison. In the research literature on types of welfare systems they all cluster together in what has widely been referred to as the social democratic type of welfare system (Esping-Andersen, 1993). Research has shown that this type of welfare system generally produces a relatively low level of homelessness in international comparison with homelessness mainly affecting people with complex needs (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015). Yet, even in these egalitarian countries with some of the most extensive welfare systems in the world, national homelessness statistics for several years have shown the persistence of a homelessness problem. Finland was the first amongst the Nordic countries to collect nationwide data on homelessness as the first national homelessness statistics was published in Finland already in 1987. Sweden followed with its first nationwide figures in 1993, although Sweden applied a methodology of data collection that was principally different from that in Finland. When Norway conducted its first homelessness count in 1996 the definition, as well as the methodology, was widely adopted from the first count in Sweden and when Denmark conducted its first homelessness count in 2007 both the definition and methodology was widely mirrored on the Swedish and Norwegian counts. Although Denmark was the last of the four countries to conduct a homelessness count, Denmark had already since 1999 established an extensive data collection system encompassing all Danish homeless shelters with the publication of an annual 'shelter statistics'.

In this article we shall explore in detail the methods of measuring homelessness in the four Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.[1] In the first section, we outline the definitions and categories of homelessness measured in each country. In the second section, we describe the methodological approaches in detail and with a particular focus on the principal differences between the widely similar methodologies used in Denmark, Norway and Sweden compared to a different methodology used in Finland. The third section examines the general strengths and weaknesses of the methodologies and the fundamental challenges involved in measuring homelessness are discussed based on the experiences from the counts. The fourth section

1 The fifth and smallest of the Nordic countries – Iceland – is not covered in the article, although a count of homelessness recently took place in Reykjavik documenting a similar profile of homelessness in the Icelandic capital as in the four larger Nordic countries.

explores the basic trends in patterns in homelessness in the countries with a particular focus on how differences in definitions and methodologies relate to the observed trends. The final section gives concluding remarks.

Definitions of Homelessness

A fundamental similarity across the Nordic countries is that the definitions of homelessness (Box 1) are all housing based, as they refer to the housing situation of the individual and do not include other characteristics of the individual person. In the research report presenting the first Norwegian homelessness count, Ulfrstad (1997) refers to a discussion in the Swedish research literature relating homelessness to the concepts of housing (Sahlin, 1992). According to Sahlin, in a historical perspective, the term homelessness has widely referred to certain life styles involving deviant behaviour, addiction and criminality, while housing, on the other hand, refers to statistical and judicial aspects of the dwelling (ibid.). Ulfrstad, with reference to Sahlin, maintains that the housing related definition emphasises the lack of a secure dwelling, in opposition to the traditional moral concept of homelessness, and thus is the most suitable concept for statistical purposes. In this way the arguments for adopting a housing-oriented definition widely resembled the arguments involved when the ETHOS-definition of homelessness and housing exclusion was developed several years later by the European Observatory on Homelessness within FEANTSA.

Although Sweden and Norway followed a different counting methodology than Finland, it was also characteristic that all three countries from the beginning included not only rough sleepers and shelter users into their homelessness definitions but also people in hidden homelessness staying temporarily with friends and relatives due to the lack of their own place to live. When Denmark started conducting national homelessness counts several years later, it was based on a similar definition incorporating hidden homelessness as well.

The inclusion of hidden homelessness into the definitions should generally be seen in relation to the universal welfare services and the high level of decommodification in the Nordic welfare systems that generally reduce the dependence on the family for providing care and support for people in need. This extends also into the understanding of homelessness as people who lack their own place to live should not be in need to depend on their family – which especially can be difficult for marginalised people who often have less resources in their family background than the average population.

Besides the category of people staying temporarily with relatives or friends, the broad understanding of homelessness is also underlined by the inclusion of institutional discharge without a housing solution into the definitions in all four countries. Thus, the definitions also include people awaiting discharge from hospitals and treatment facilities or release from prison without a housing solution, with only some minor variations amongst the countries in these categories such as differences in the criteria on duration and time until discharge for these situations to be regarded and counted as homelessness.

Table 1

Country	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
National homelessness definition	Conceptual definition: People are homeless when they do not have their own dwelling or room (owned or rented) but use temporary facilities, stay temporarily and without a contract with family, friends or acquaintances. People are also homeless if they have no place to stay the following night. Operative definition: - Sleeping on the street, in a stairway, a shed etc. - Staying in an emergency night shelter - Staying in a homeless shelter/ homeless hostel - Staying in a hotel, hostel or similar due to homelessness - Staying temporarily and without a contract with family, friends or acquaintances - Staying in transitionary housing without a permanent contract - Discharge from prison or criminal ward within a month without a housing solution - Release from hospital or treatment facility within a month without a housing solution - Other (e.g. staying in camping wagons or garden allotment houses)	Single homeless persons without permanent place of residence. This group includes people: - living outdoors, staircases, night shelters for homeless people - living in hostels or equivalent form of temporary residence due to lack of housing (usually paid by social services to provide person emergency housing) - living in care homes or other housing units, rehabilitation units and hospitals due to lack of housing. This category does not include those who are permanently placed to these institutions (have a rent contract with the institution or are not otherwise searching for housing) - living temporarily with relatives or friends. This category does not include young people (under 25) living with their parents. Homeless families: - Families and couples who are living in temporary housing or split up due to the lack of housing	A person is homeless when s/he lacks a place to live, either rented or owned, and finds themselves in one of the following situations: - Has no place to stay for the night - Is referred to emergency or temporary shelter accommodation - Is a ward of the correctional service and due to be released in two months at the latest - Is a resident of an institution and due to be discharged in two months at the latest - Lives with friends, acquaintances or family on a temporary basis Persons living in sublet accommodation or residing permanently with family and close relations are not covered by the definition.	The official national definition of homelessness in Sweden is divided into four homelessness situations: 1. acute homelessness; 2. institutional or assisted living; 3. long-term living arrangements organised by social services (e.g. the secondary housing market); and 4. private short-term living arrangements

Although the understandings and definitions of homelessness are very similar across all the four countries, there are also important differences. Whilst the basic methodology is the same in the homelessness counts in Denmark, Norway and Sweden – and different from the methodology in Finland – the most notable difference in the definitions of homelessness across the four countries do not follow this basic difference in the methodology as the most distinctive difference in the definitions is that the Swedish definition includes a main category of people living in ordinary housing but with second-hand and temporary rental contracts. In Sweden, it is common that municipal social services rent a flat from a housing association and holds the contract and then sublets the flat to homeless people on a second-hand contract and often with some behavioural conditions attached to it, regarding the possibility to achieve a permanent rent contract, which usually requires meeting certain criteria such as adherence to substance abuse treatment or even abstinence. The hegemony of the staircase of transition in Sweden has been widely documented in the Swedish research literature (Sahlin, 2005; Löfstrand, 2005; Knutagård, 2009). It has also been emphasised how the growth of the secondary housing market in Sweden should be seen in the wider context of liberalisation and marketisation in Swedish housing policies that has generally introduced stronger barriers of access to housing for marginalised people in Sweden. In terms of the definition of homelessness it explains why people on temporary contracts in the secondary housing market is an important category in the Swedish homelessness definition.

Although secondary contracts are also used in Finland, this category is not included in the Finnish definition of homelessness as people with a rent contract with the municipality widely holds the same rights and autonomy as other tenants (the law granting quite strong rights and security for tenants in general). Moreover, any additional behavioural conditions do not apply to these contracts in Finland whereas this is usually the case in Sweden.

Although homelessness policies in both Finland and Norway historically also had considerable elements of the Treatment First model (or setting behavioural requirements for obtaining housing without necessarily providing sufficient treatment and support) the turn towards a Housing First and housing-led model has been stronger in these countries compared to Sweden, and Housing First has been the mainstream principle of Finnish homelessness policies for more than a decade. However, the Finnish model of Housing First differs from the US Pathway model. In Finland, the residents pay the rent themselves and needed services are offered for them using the existing services in society (Y-Foundation, 2017). In Norway, Housing First appeared rather late representing one of several methods, and is quite close to the US Pathway Housing First model. However, an orientation towards a housing-led model occurred in Norwegian policy programmes already from the early 2000s. In Denmark, Housing First was introduced as the main principle in homelessness policies in 2009 and although elements of the Treatment First approach were common before that time, the use of secondary contracts never played a role in Danish homelessness policies due to a strong tradition of providing own primary rental contracts when vulnerable people were housed in the public housing sector. Thus in Denmark, Finland and Norway the national homelessness definition and the operational categories used in the counts do not include people on secondary contracts simply because this is not a common situation in these countries or as in Finland because the tenant rights and obligations when using secondary contracts are generally similar to primary contracts.

The Methodologies of Data Collection on Homelessness in the Four Countries

In this section, the methodologies of measuring homelessness in the Nordic countries are examined in detail. Although Finland was the first amongst the four countries to enumerate homelessness, we shall first explore the methodology used in the homelessness counts in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, as these countries widely follow the same methodology that originated from the first Swedish homelessness count, and was since then adopted in both Norway and Denmark.

The homelessness counts in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

In Denmark, Norway and Sweden data on homelessness are collected by cross sectional 'counts' or 'censuses' measuring homelessness in a time window of one week. In the national language the wording used about these censuses/counts is 'mappings' (kortlægning/kartlegging/kartläggning). For conceptual reasons and corresponding to the common terminology in the international research literature we shall use the term 'counts' in this article. The counts include persons in the homelessness situations included in the respective definitions of each country and who are in contact with or known by the local services in the time window of one week. The counts are generally carried out in two steps. Step one involves mapping and composing the sample of respondents – the local services and agencies that will participate in the count. At step two, these services and agencies fill out an individual questionnaire for each homeless person they are in contact with or know of during the time window. As the counts are comprehensive data collections involving a large number of local services, they are not conducted every year. In Sweden, the counts are only conducted every sixth year, in Norway every four years, whereas Denmark has the shortest interval conducting the count every second year. The time scale is decided by the government and is a political decision reflecting what the governments in each country finds is adequate for steering purposes.

A very important aspect of the methodology is that the data collection for the counts is not restricted to the homelessness sector, i.e. street outreach teams and homeless shelters. In fact, these are a minor part of the respondent group. The majority of respondents incorporate a wide range of other agencies and services in the welfare system. In this regard, the homelessness counts in Denmark, Norway and Sweden can be characterized as 'extended service-based counts' whereby 'extended' refers to the inclusion of a wide range of services outside the homeless sector. Thus, the data collection also includes municipal social services, employment agencies, addiction treatment centres, and psychiatric treatment facilities, selected parts of the general health systems in each country, prisons, and a wide range of NGO-services. The inclusion of this wider range of services into the counts is crucial in order to obtain information on people experiencing hidden homelessness, and especially information about people staying temporarily with friends or relatives due to homelessness, as information on this group is often reported from for instance municipal social agencies, employment agencies, or treatment facilities etc. that have people in this situation amongst their clients. Besides the overall commonality in the type of services included in the counts, there are also some variations between the three countries in what services are included, depending primarily on the more specific characteristics of service provision in each country. For instance in Norway and Sweden, all women's crisis centres are generally included in the count, whereas in Denmark centres for women experiencing domestic violence are generally not included in the counts, as these centres are operated under a specific paragraph in the social service law, with separate statistics attached to these services. In this way the specific setup of services and the legislative framework within each country is likely to determine more specific decisions on what type of services to include in the counts – and what type of situations to define as homelessness.

The agencies and services participating in the count collect individual data for each person they are in contact with or they know is in a homelessness situation during the count week. The information is collected on the basis of an individual questionnaire that besides information about the specific type of homelessness situation also comprises demographic background variables (gender, age, nationality) as well as income source, health, reasons for homelessness and information on other services that the person receives. Although the questionnaires used in each country are quite similar, there are also some variations for instance regarding details about household composition and educational status, the latter being recorded in the Norwegian questionnaire but not in the Danish and Swedish ones.

In all three countries it is optional for the agencies and services participating in the count to choose whether service users are involved in filling out the individual information or whether information is filled out by staff, which is most common for the majority of services in all three countries, a procedure permitted in national data protection laws and/or by special permissions in the case of data collections of national interest in its field. For health services this type of data collection also requires special permissions from health authorities. The data collection is both internet and postal based, and the choice of response channel is also optional for the services. In Sweden, the data is collected by a government agency – the National Board of Health and Welfare, whereas in Denmark and Norway the counts have been conducted by research institutes (The Danish Center for Social Science Research VIVE and The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research NIBR) on behalf of central government agencies.

When collecting individual data across many different local agencies and services a crucial element is to be able to conduct a rigorous control for 'double counts' – the risk of collecting data on the same person more than once. This control is conducted through collecting information that can provide identification of each individual. In Denmark and Sweden, data laws permit the collection of full personal numbers that are unique identifiers, whereas in Norway there is no permission to collect the full personal number and instead the person's year of birth, the birthday (not month) and initials is registered. Yet, also in Denmark and Sweden full personal numbers are not obtained for all persons registered in the count, and partial information such as initials is also used in these cases to control for duplicates. Through combining the available information about the persons recorded, duplicates are identified and removed. This method is not "watertight", and there is both a risk of removing 'false positives' or keeping in 'false negatives' in the data. Yet, a rigorous control combining both electronic and manual control is conducted to avoid counting the same person more than once or identified 'false duplicates' in cases when persons for instance has similar initials and/or similar birth dates.

Besides the differences in whether full personal identification information is allowed to be collected, another difference in the methodologies between these otherwise very identical counts, regards the extent to which subsampling and weighing procedures are involved – both regarding the selection of respondents and to compensate for fallouts in responses from certain local services. Such weighting and estimation procedures have been used in the Norwegian counts where they have been introduced at two stages. The first stage compensate for a selection of municipalities. In 1996 (the first count), Norway had around 450 municipalities, mainly with less than 40 000 and the majority below 10 000 inhabitants. To make the survey manageable, whilst all municipalities above 40 000 inhabitants were included, a selection of municipalities with less than 40 000 inhabitants was grouped by population and, within each group, a sample was randomly selected. The number of registered homeless in these municipalities was weighted, simply to compensate for the selection. Small adjustments to the municipal selections, primarily due to mergers and population growth, were made in the proceeding surveys. However, major changes were introduced in 2012, when a group of municipalities participating in a national led social housing work programme was included (many was already among the selection of municipalities, but not all). As changes of the number of people recorded in homelessness was generally considered an important measure of progress and a result from the programme, including this group of municipalities not part of the original selection criterion, contributed to a skewness of the original selection. In the count in 2016 and 2020, which is not yet reported or published, all municipalities were included, and weighting to compensate for selection of municipalities was no longer required.

Moreover, estimations at a second stage was introduced in the Norwegian count in 2003 to compensate for fallout of respondents. These estimations are based on the assumption that the fallouts (non-participating services) know of/are in contact with half the number of homeless persons compared to those who respond. The estimates are applied on the most important municipal respondents, those who usually register most homeless persons, and not on the national sample. An average number of homeless persons in groups of respondents and groups of municipalities and city districts constitute a base for calculating a number of homeless amongst the units that did not respond. In the most recent counts this procedure has been simplified, and this weighting procedure has only been applied on a limited scale in the latest counts. All forms of weighting and calculations, although based on representative numbers for specific groups of municipalities (population size which largely coincide with the urban/rural dimension) implies a certain insecurity, which demands caution regarding the weighting criterion. A limited weighting procedure is likely to compensate for a minimum of the under-reporting due to fallouts among respondents, whereas not weighting for important fallouts (types of municipalities/agencies that normally report the major share of homeless persons) would result in a too low figure (evaluated in Dyb, 2019).

By contrast, such sampling and weighting procedures are not included in the Danish count. When Denmark initiated its first national count in 2007, a reform of administrative divisions in Denmark had just reduced the number of municipalities from about 270 to only 98 municipalities, and it was decided to include all municipalities into the Danish count. Likewise, in the Danish count weighting procedures are not used to compensate for fallouts in the responses from particular local services. The overall participation rate has generally been high in Denmark, especially amongst the most important services such as homeless shelters and municipal social centres, that in combination contribute with large numbers of individual cases. Given a relatively high participation rate, it has so far been considered that the potential benefits of introducing weighting procedures is outweighed by the distortion it introduces between estimates and the actually counted number of people. However, in the Danish count in 2019 there was a certain decline in participation rates, albeit this drop was primarily restricted to a few smaller and a few medium-sized municipalities. Yet, even this relatively moderate decline could be detected in the actual numbers reported, and in the overall reporting of results it was concluded that a small decline in homelessness numbers from approximately 6600 in 2017 to 6400 people in 2019, could mainly be attributed to this decline in responses in a smaller number of municipalities and that if this drop had not occurred the figures in 2019 could be expected to have been similar to those in 2017 (Benjaminsen, 2019). A similar challenge of declining response rates has been seen in Sweden. In the latest count one fifth of the Swedish municipalities (290 in total) did not respond to the questionnaires. Yet, most of the municipalities that did not respond were relatively small with less than 15000 inhabitants. These challenges underline that a level of general uncertainty is to be expected in a nationwide count of a complex phenomenon of homelessness that relies on the reporting from hundreds of local agencies and services.

Homelessness statistics in Finland

As previously mentioned, Finland was the first amongst the Nordic countries to provide national statistics on homelessness as data on homelessness has been collected in Finland every year since 1987 where ending homelessness was also mentioned for the first time in the programme of the government. The information has been obtained in the same way every year since then and is collected by the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA). Only minor changes in the statistics have occurred as more profiling information has been included over time (men/women, young people and people with immigrant background). Data on people in penal institutions to be released without a home was collected until 2014. The data provides cross-sectional (point in time) data on homelessness; the date of the count being on the 15th of November each year. Thus, compared to the other three countries an important difference is that the data collection on homelessness in Finland is a one day count which is conducted on a yearly basis compared to the 'week counts' not conducted every year in the three other countries.

The basic methodology in the Finnish data collection is also different compared to the extended service-based counts that are conducted in the three other countries and where the data is collected simultaneously from a wide range of agencies and services both public and private. Instead, the data on homelessness in Finland is gathered with an electronic survey that is sent to all Finnish municipalities at the same time every year by ARA. Municipalities gather the information on homeless persons in their municipalities from different sources e.g. housing officials and municipal rental housing companies (people applying for subsidised/council housing), social officials and service providers (information on customers).

Municipalities are also instructed to use register data to complete their estimate on the number of homeless persons and families. For example, homeless persons are prioritised in the social housing allocation procedures. Therefore, some people might falsely report themselves being homeless. Looking into persons' information from the Population Information System might therefore reveal that the person has a permanent place of residence. Earlier, the municipalities' social services granted the social assistance that is last-resort financial assistance, but this task was centralised to the Social Insurance Institution of Finland in 2017. Since then, the biggest municipalities have also received a list of social assistance applicants that have identified to be homeless, from the Social Insurance Institution. The municipalities go through and cross-check the data from different sources by using the social security numbers to remove any duplicates.

The information on homelessness is gathered for different population groups (men/women, young people under the age of 25, persons with immigrant background, single persons/families). Thus, a difference compared to the individual questionnaires used in the counts in the three other countries is that less profiling information is obtained in the Finnish data collection that rather record the most fundamental demographic data of the person rather than filling out a full individual questionnaire. The collected data is processed by ARA. Any noted anomalies (for example big changes in the numbers compared to previous years) are checked with the municipalities. The survey also includes questions about the sources that the municipality has used to obtain the data and an open field where municipalities can explain, for example, the reasons for the possible changes in the figures as well as the measures done to reduce homelessness.

Strengths and Weaknesses in Measurement

As previously mentioned in Denmark, Norway and Sweden a general concern regards the participation rate. As it is all voluntary for agencies and services – public as well as private – to participate in the count, a high participation rate is crucial to fulfil the main objective of the counts, namely, to establish a complete national number of people in a homelessness situation. Although there is mostly a good commitment to participate in the counts amongst majority of the services, the non-response rate has been increasing in the most recent counts in all three countries and is generally a challenge when conducting the homelessness counts. In all three countries, there is generally a continuous increase in the number of surveys and obligations to report on services for local authorities. Thus, the attention and time of the respondents to prioritise the homeless counts meets heavy competition from other surveys and administrative reporting responsibilities. As accounted for above, fallouts can to some extent be compensated for by applying some weighting and adjustment of the reported figures as is done in the Norwegian count in order to establish a more precise figure. However, at the same time all forms of adjustments potentially distort the number of people that were actually counted. The challenge of non-response from local services is generally met with prioritising reminders to and personal contact with important respondents in cities and larger municipalities. These respondents register the bulk of homeless persons, and reducing the fallout in these respondent groups substantially reduces the insecurity of the total number of people experiencing homeless.

In Finland, as previously mentioned, the data collection is organised differently as each municipality collects and processes local data – including administrative data, before a number (and other key information) is reported from each municipality to the central data collecting agency. A general weakness of the data collection is that even if the municipalities are given instructions, the practices and sources to gather data vary between municipalities and are not always well documented. Yet, the response rate of the Finnish survey to municipalities is generally good including almost all municipalities as the responding municipalities represent a total of around 99 per cent of the Finnish population.

Another issue, which may be considered as a weakness, is that the registration in the extended service-based counts in Denmark, Norway and Sweden is limited to homeless persons in contact with or known by the welfare, health and correctional services etc. that participate in the counts. Thus, the overall number of people recorded in a homelessness situation generally excludes those people who may not be in contact with or is otherwise known by any of these services. Yet, the wide range of services, and the fact that a majority of the respondents are not services specifically targeting homelessness, largely compensate for this weakness.

Another issue not directly related to the benefit of each count or to the method as such, is the lack of complete individual identification data in the case of the Norwegian count. With individual identification data from the homeless count can be coupled to other data bases, which in turn might have opened up for establishing control groups, tracking individual homeless histories and other more sophisticated analysis and access to extended knowledge about homelessness. In Denmark, where the full personal numbers are allowed to be recorded, and where more than four out of five registrations contain the full personal number, these numbers have been coupled to general register data, following the strict safety procedures involved in conducting this type of analysis, thus enabling more detailed analysis of risk factors and pathways in and out of homelessness (Benjaminsen and Enemark, 2017).

Trends in Homelessness

The measurement of homelessness in the four countries enables the comparison of trends across the countries over a long period of years. In Finland, Sweden and Norway the results go back two to three decades and in Denmark the counts have provided numbers of homelessness for a decade. The counts generally show a diverging trend across the countries, as a decrease in homelessness has been observed in both Finland and Norway, whereas increases have been seen in both Denmark and Sweden in recent years.

In Finland homelessness has been more than halved since 1987 when the statistics started as more than 18 000 people were recorded in homelessness when the measurement was done for the first time more than three decades ago. Especially, long-term homelessness has diminished notably and today, the biggest share of homeless people lives with friends and families. This development can generally be attributed to a systematic application of the Housing First approach which has involved the replacement of shelters with permanent housing solutions that has inevitably led in reduction of those living in shelter and emergency accommodation. For example, in Helsinki, there is currently only a service centre with around 50 beds for emergency use. The Finnish policies have also included a targeted approach to increasing general housing supply aimed at low income and marginalised groups.

In Norway, there has been some fluctuation in figures but the most recent count documents a downward trend. The first count in 1996 registered 6 200 persons. By the next census (2003) the number had dropped to 5 200 persons. After 2003 there is a small but steady increase up till 2008, when the curve flattens. The actual number further increased up to 2012, however due to population growth the relative number in 2012 stayed equal to the count in 2008. Yet, the latest available figures show a considerable decrease in homelessness as about 3 900 people were recorded in a homelessness situation in the latest count from 2016.

In Denmark, comparisons of figures usually take 2009 as a point of departure, due to a minor adjustment of the definition following the experiences of the first count. Whilst about 5 000 people was recorded in a homelessness situation in the first count (of which about 500 were rough sleepers), this figure showed a succeeding increase during the following counts and culminated in 2017 where about 6 600 people were recorded to be in a homelessness situation during the count week. This number decreased slightly in 2019, when 6 400 people were recorded to be in a homelessness situation. However, as previously mentioned this small decrease could mainly be attributed to a small decline in the participation rates in a smaller number of municipalities and when taking this into account the Danish figures are assessed to be on a similar level in 2019 as in 2017.

The largest increase in homelessness has been documented in Sweden, which has both the highest absolute and relative homelessness figures amongst the Nordic countries. Sweden has had five national homelessness counts (1993, 1999, 2005, 2011 and 2017). Although the overall level of homelessness was similar in the latest count in 2017 compared to 2011, the number of people in acute homelessness increased and there was particularly an increase in the number of women in acute homelessness. A large share of these women have children and a large share were born in another country. One third of the women in acute homelessness reported domestic violence as one of the factors behind their homelessness situation. In the 2017 count there was also an increase in the number of people in long-term living arrangements without permanent contracts (e.g. the secondary housing market) that make up almost half of all people recorded in homelessness. In total, Sweden had 33 269 homeless persons in 2017. Of the total number 15 838 belonged to situation three, which includes living in the secondary housing market and other long-term but non-permanent living arrangements organised by social services. As previously mentioned, this secondary housing market has increased in size over the years and has become an institutionalised practice.[2] However, only few people (7.8 per cent) end up taking over the contract and as a consequences of this system, it is difficult to progress to a first-hand contract, and the sub-let contract increases the risk of the household to fall out and lose their contract if they do not comply with the rules. If the secondary housing market would be excluded from the definition of homelessness, the number of homeless individuals per thousand inhabitants would drop from 3.3 to 1.7 (Knutagård, 2018).

The Swedish count in 2017 also showed that around 25 per cent of the persons in long-term living arrangements did not have any other problems than the lack of housing. The results from Sweden indicate that homelessness increasingly falls into two categories. The socially homeless and the so-called structurally homeless. The former refers to homeless persons that have other social problems like mental health problems, addiction, debts *et cetera* in combination with the lack of housing. The structurally homeless refers to persons that only lack housing. In two municipalities (Gothenburg and Malmö), new guidelines have been adopted that guides the social workers not to assist structurally homeless persons or families. They are only entitled to emergency assistance, if they cannot find a solution on their own. For single homeless individuals, this emergency assistance is on a day-to-day basis, and for homeless families it is on a weekly basis (Sahlin, 2020). The full effects of these guidelines remain to be seen, but there is a high risk for structurally homeless individuals and families to end up in a homelessness situation that would

2 According to the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (NBHBP) there were 26 100 apartments on the secondary housing market in 2019 (NBHBP, 2019).

be defined as socially homeless. Families are placed in emergency housing for a week and after a week they have to reapply for emergency assistance. This can lead to children having to move to a new place every week.

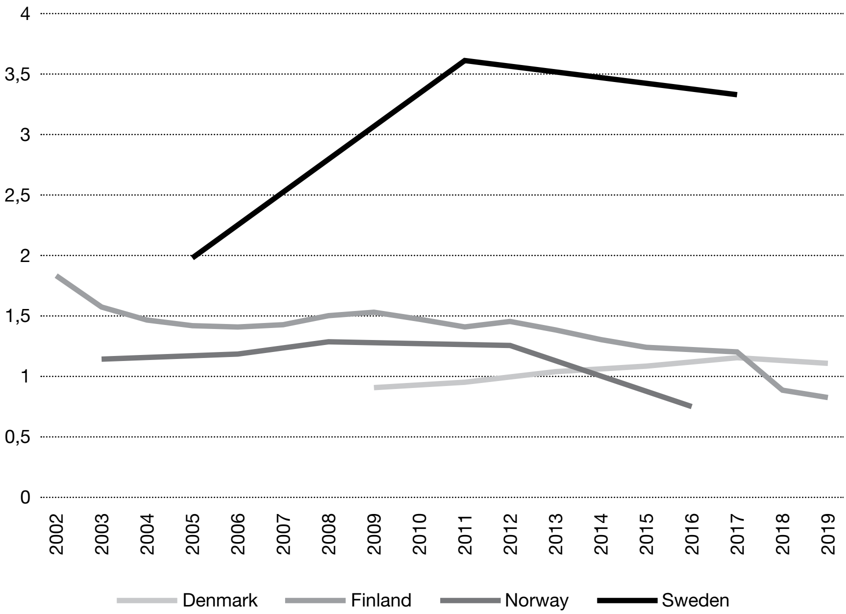
The results of the counts also show that besides people in temporary accommodation (shelters, homeless hostels etc.), people staying with friends and relatives are also a relatively large group. For instance in Denmark, in the latest count from 2019, there were 2 290 people in homeless shelters/hostels and an additional 313 people in emergency night shelters, whereas there were 1 630 people staying with friends and relatives, due to homelessness. In 2019, 732 people were recorded as rough sleepers in the Danish count. In Finland the vast majority – 3 067 people were staying temporarily with friends or relatives, whereas there were 1 167 either staying outside or in temporary shelter and hostels. Also in Norway the largest group (37 per cent) consists of those who stay with friends, acquaintances or relatives, whereas 29 per cent live in temporary lodging (Dyb and Lid, 2017).

However, when comparing the number of homeless people recorded across the countries it should be taken into account that the size of the general population varies across the four countries, with Sweden having by far the biggest population, as there are about 10 million inhabitants in Sweden, almost 6 million in Denmark and about 5½ million inhabitants in both Finland and Norway.

Figure 1 shows the number of people recorded in homelessness per 1 000 inhabitants and thus enables a comparison of the relative trends in homelessness across the four countries. The graph has been limited to a 15-year period from 2004 to 2019. Whilst the figures for Denmark, Norway and Sweden refers to all categories of people in homelessness, the numbers for Finland only includes single homeless people, whereas homeless families are not included in the graph, as the number of persons in homeless families is not available for most of the period and numbers thus cannot be added. Yet, the total number of homeless families in Finland is quite small, as only 257 homeless families was recorded in the Finnish count in November 2019, whereas there were 4 552 single homeless persons.

The graph shows that besides the difference in the overall rising trend in Denmark and Sweden, and the falling trend in Finland and Norway, some further divergence can be noticed across the countries. At the onset of the period, Finland and Sweden had the highest number of homeless people relative to population size. Thus, previously Finland had a somewhat larger share of homeless people than both Norway and Denmark relative to population size, but the rate in Finland has since then decreased and is now lower than in Denmark. Yet, based on the latest available figures from 2016, Norway has the lowest rate of people in homelessness amongst the four countries although Finland is approaching almost a similar low rate in 2019. Whilst Denmark had the lowest relative rate amongst the countries at the onset of the Danish counts of homelessness, it has since then surpassed the rates of both Finland and Norway. However the highest rate of homelessness amongst the Nordic countries – also relative to population size – is found in Sweden, where about 3.5 homeless people per 1 000 inhabitants were recorded in both the two latest counts in 2011 and 2016. This is a substantially higher rate than in any of the other countries. As previously mentioned the definition of homelessness in Sweden is broader than in the other countries including also people in the secondary housing market, living on non-permanent contracts in municipal sublets, often with conditions attached to the stay. Yet, the higher rate of homeless in Sweden cannot be explained by the absence of this category in the definitions in the three other countries and thus by a narrower definition of homelessness in Denmark, Finland and Norway. By contrast the absence of this category in the three other countries as well as the lower numbers should rather be seen as a reflection of the absence of a similar secondary housing market in these countries. In a wider sense, the differences may likely also reflect the extensive liberalisation of the public housing sectors in Sweden that did not take place in the other countries (where in particular Denmark also has a substantial stock of public housing). Together with the widespread use of the staircase model the liberalisation of public housing reinforced the need for a secondary housing market, due to high entry barriers to housing for vulnerable people in Sweden.

Figure 1: Homelessness per 1 000 inhabitants in the Nordic Countries



Besides giving information of overall trends, the profiling information available in the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish counts also provide valuable insights into the composition of homelessness in these countries. This information generally shows that homelessness in Denmark, Norway and Sweden is widely concentrated amongst people with complex support needs e.g. due to mental illness and substance abuse problems. The research literature generally associates this pattern with both the extensive welfare systems and the low level of income poverty, which means that homelessness primarily due to poverty and housing affordability problems is less common.

As previously mentioned less detailed profiling information is available in Finland. The basic demographic information collected in Finland show that the share with immigrant background amongst people in a homelessness situation has increased as the share of immigrant population has generally increased in the whole country. There has been some fluctuation in the shares of other categories (young, women, etc.) over the years but no clear patterns emerge as these figures have gone a bit up and down over the years.

Whilst generally showing that homelessness is on a relatively low level (with the exception of Sweden), at the same time the evidence from the Nordic countries shows that even in these countries with extensive welfare systems, people with complex support needs do have a risk of falling through these otherwise comprehensive social safety nets. The persistence of homelessness as a severe form of social marginalisation in these otherwise wealthy and egalitarian countries also explains why the Nordic countries have put considerable effort into producing detailed measurement and data on homelessness for several years.

Homelessness Counts and Governance

From a governance perspective, the production of knowledge through standardised categories and enumeration is at the core of the modern state's way of governing (Rose, 1991; Scott, 1998). As Scott (1998) maintains, knowledge of the inhabitants through standardised and quantified categories is essential in state governance. Whilst caution should always be applied as to how definitions and enumerations may shape the understanding and governance of a phenomenon, the homelessness counts in the Nordic countries generate valuable knowledge and figures that define the field and provide tools of steering. In all four countries the data from the counts have been used both as input into the design of homelessness programmes as well as outcome monitoring of the performance of such programmes. The national counts and the data they produce is a monitoring tool that provides feedback to central and local authorities about the performance and achievements of programmes and other interventions. Although national programmes and strategies are subject to their own evaluations, developments in the number of homeless people are the ultimate feedback on whether the measures are effective and whether local authorities have followed up as expected. Moreover, the count figures are not only used to measure whether the policy has the expected effect, but are also applied to identify groups and specific issues, such as priority groups in the next national programme or initiative. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the counts include a set of variables that can compose and describe specific subgroups, such as young people and families with children, and define these as priority problem categories for the next programme. In Finland, categories, already identified in previous surveys, become part of the definition. Thus it should be noted that quantification itself is a form of legitimacy and the construction of homeless people through definitions and quantification is central to legitimising political priority to groups that come under the definition.

In a broader perspective, the data collection on homelessness in the Nordic countries should also be seen as part of a general tradition of extensive use of data in the Nordic welfare states. National statistics agencies covered by their own legislation are established to collect, store and manage data about the inhabitant and numerous series of different phenomena. Thus the Nordic countries generally have very extensive statistical databases and the address of residence as well as interactions with the extensive welfare system is widely used to collect statistics about the population. However, people experiencing homelessness are characterised by not having a fixed address. To some extent, the authorities in well-organised states such as the Nordic countries can use registers of people who use services for homeless people, such as homeless hostels and the like. However, with the relatively wide definitions of homelessness used in the Nordic counts, statistics based solely on the users of homeless services will be deficient. As we have described in this article, in all four countries, social services and agencies, which take care of those who have fallen through other parts of the safety net, are the main respondents of the homelessness counts. In particular, people who live temporarily with family or friends, who is a very large group in these registrations, only to a limited extent will be registered as users of services targeting homeless persons but will often be known by other agencies and services in the broader welfare system. Thus, the national homelessness counts not only encompass a definition that reflect the broad notion of homelessness in the Nordic countries but also draws upon the existence of the extensive welfare system for enabling the necessary methodology to measure homelessness according to this definition, namely the extended service based counts that is the defining feature of the Nordic homelessness counts.

Concluding Remarks

This article has explored the measurement of homelessness in the Nordic countries. Whilst Denmark, Norway and Sweden follow a widely similar approach collecting individual data on people in a homelessness situation from a wide range of local services and agencies, Finland collects data on homelessness in a somewhat different way as the primary collection and processing takes place at municipal level before data is gathered and further processed at national level. This difference in set up also has more specific methodological implications. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden a comprehensive individual questionnaire is collected for each person in a homelessness situation during the count week, enabling detailed profiling information regarding for instance health and the reasons behind being in a homelessness situation. By contrasts, the Finnish data does not include the same kind of detailed profiling information as only a more restricted set of demographic characteristics is recorded for each person. This also reflects that the Finnish data is not based on a specific individual questionnaire but relies on municipalities collecting and combining local administrative data e.g. from the housing and social service sectors.

Despite these principal methodological differences, the national statistics widely enables cross country comparisons, especially since the underlying understandings and definitions of homelessness are very similar. In all four countries, besides rough sleepers and shelter users the definitions also encompass people in hidden homelessness, namely those who stay temporarily with friends and relatives due to the lack of their own place to live. However, one important difference in the definitions regards the main category of people in long-term housing without permanent contracts in the Swedish homelessness definition, reflecting the widespread use of secondary rental contracts in Sweden, which is less common or non-existing in the other countries. This example illustrates how differences in housing and social systems across the countries affects the constitution of homelessness and also how homelessness is defined and measured.

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