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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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Far From Home? The Role of Homelessness NGOs in Fostering the Resilient Arrival City Through Alliance-Building and Migrant Integration

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Abstract_ *Resilience is a leading concept in disaster scholarship that has mainly been studied in the context of in situ recovery and reconstruction following natural disasters or in temporary settlements, such as refugee camps, in the aftermath of humanitarian crises. However, it has not been sufficiently investigated in multi-crisis arrival cities receiving acute refugee inflows. The aim of this paper is to fill this knowledge gap by conceptualising the 'resilient arrival city' and further revealing the critical role of homelessness NGOs in resilience-building in multi-crisis arrival contexts, especially through political activation and the integration of refugees and unaccompanied minors. Drawing on field research conducted in Athens (Greece) in collaboration with a Greek homelessness NGO, the paper argues that homelessness NGOs foster the resilient arrival city through the implementation of refugee housing and integration programmes, the provision of improved social services, the formation of socially innovative governance arrangements, and the establishment of strategic partnerships with peer NGOs, international organisations, and public authorities to promote cities and housing for all.*

Keywords_ *resilient arrival city; refugee integration; social innovation; bottom-linked governance; housing; homelessness NGOs*

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Introduction

Post-disaster resilience scholarship has mainly studied resilience-building processes taking place in *in situ* recovery following disasters triggered by natural hazards or in the context of displacement (e.g., refugee camps) in the aftermath of humanitarian crises. These processes are largely led by the displaced communities themselves, civic society organisations, built environment professionals (e.g., for-profit and non-profit housing developers, architects), and local or national public authorities. What remains understudied is an understanding of resilience in the context of displacement and relocation of refugees[1] in *arrival cities* in new national territories, characterised by a multi-layered crisis both for the displaced population (reception and integration crisis) and for the recipient city/country (social, debt, economic, structural crisis). More attention also needs to be drawn to the role of *homelessness NGOs* in addressing the aforementioned crises and fostering the *resilient arrival city* through their advocacy, networking, and refugee integration and housing programmes. Homelessness NGOs are considered those non-governmental organisations who fight against homelessness by providing temporary or permanent housing solutions and social services to people who are roofless, houseless, or living in insecure or inadequate housing.[2] The theoretical insights informing the argument of this paper derive from disaster resilience, social innovation, and migrant integration. Specifically, the paper is embedded in a critical approach of 'resilience', whereby the discursive call for resilience can never be apolitical or power-blind but a fundamentally debated and politically fraught discourse enwrapped with power relations, discursive hegemony, social innovation, and governance fermentations (Davoudi et al., 2012; Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2017; Teigão dos Santos and Partidário, 2011). The paper also distances itself from a 'technocratic' paradigm of social innovation in which initiatives are considered too reformist and compliant with neoliberal logics (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2018). Conversely, it allies with a 'democratic' paradigm and an emancipatory tradition of social innovation which puts stress on the political dimension of social interactions and foregrounds dissensus, empowerment, and solidarity in the form of invigorated political capabilities (e.g., formal and informal alliances) to access necessary resources for needs satisfaction, create counter-hegemonic alternatives, and ferment more democratic bottom-linked governance arrangements (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2018).

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1 In this paper we use the term 'refugees' as a general term that includes asylum seekers and persons who have been granted refugee status or subsidiary/humanitarian protection status (recognised refugees). The paper largely focuses on unaccompanied minors, a refugee subgroup with special vulnerability features.

2 See the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion by FEANTSA: https://www.feantsa.org/download/ethos2484215748748239888.pdf.

Empirically, the paper draws upon evidence from the post-2015 EU 'refugee crisis' context in the arrival city of Athens (Greece), providing answers to the following dual key research question: To what extent can homelessness NGOs nurture a resilient (multi-crisis) arrival city through (1) their programmes on social integration and housing provision for refugees, and (2) their political activation and formation of novel, more democratic governance arrangements toward an improved social public policy in the arrival city context?

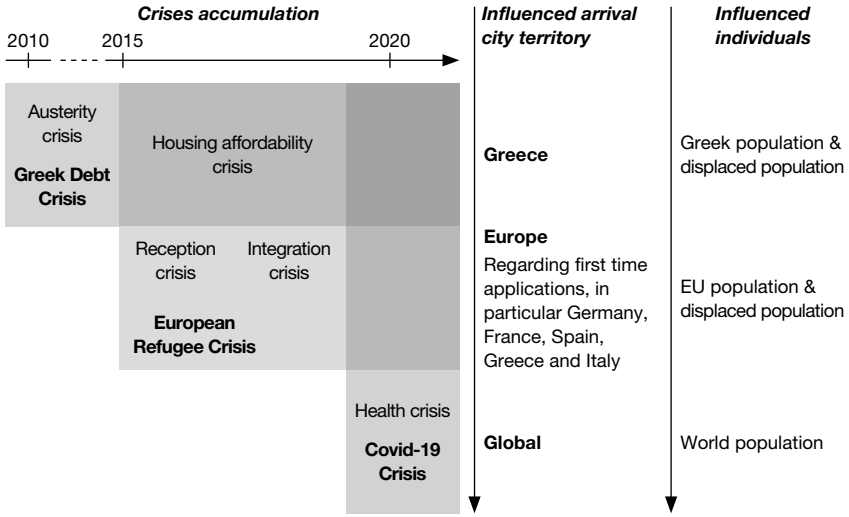
The city of Athens makes a pertinent case study for this investigation because, since the 2015 Syrian crisis, this metropolis has become an arrival city for refugees from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia, who used Eastern and Central Mediterranean Sea routes to seek asylum to Europe. Indicatively, Greece reported 856 723 refugee sea arrivals in 2015; a number corresponding to 8.2% of the country's permanent population, while Italy being the second highest European state with a recorded 153 842 arrivals that equals 0.25% of its population (ELSTAT, 2021; ISTAT, 2022; UNHCR, 2016). Moreover, since 2019, one in five unaccompanied minors (UAMs)[3] in Europe, a highly vulnerable subgroup of the refugee population, applied for asylum in Greece (Eurostat, 2020) and has been housed by homelessness NGOs through different housing arrangements, such as protected 'safe zones', hotels, shelters, and Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments (European Commission, 2015; Greek Council for Refugees, 2020). In recent years, overcrowded shelters forced some UAMs to abandon these facilities and sleep outdoors, leaving them exposed to heightened risks of exploitation. In 2023, over 41 000 UAMs sought asylum across the EU – the second-highest number recorded since 2015 – highlighting the growing pressures on national reception systems (FEANTSA, 2024). Procedural inefficiencies (e.g., slow administrative processes, bureaucratic legal hurdles, unjustified rejections) and limited access to essential services have continued to exacerbate their vulnerability and undermined their prospects for integration (FEANTSA, 2024).

Another reason for the selection of Athens as a pertinent case study for this research investigation was its multi-crisis context. One of the immediate actions taken by the EU to manage the rapid refugee inflow in 2015 was the establishment of 'hotspot' structures that hosted the first reception and identification services. Increasing needs for accommodation infrastructure, administration and assistance services, transportation to urban centres, and asylum facilities emerged and had to be covered by the recipient states in collaboration with European and interna-

3 Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) are children under the age of 18 who arrive on the territory of an EU Member unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the EU Member state concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person or who is left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the EU Member state (European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs).

tional organisations. This urgent management of refugee reception coincided with a *socio-economic crisis* period in Greece shaped by a series of austerity policies (2010-2017) to counter the Greek Government's debt in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis. Among others, the austerity measures imposed by the EU on the Greek Government in 2009 were spending cuts on public services and a reformation of the healthcare system (Rady, 2012). Combined with a loss of competitiveness in the international market, the austerity measures led to a steep rise in unemployment rates and poverty levels (unemployment rates rocketed from 7.8% in 2008 to a peak of 27.5% in 2013), significant loss of income, a widening of income inequality, a sharp increase in the number of uninsured citizens, an increase in taxes for housing and consumption products (Benmecheddal et al., 2017; Statista, 2021; Stylianidis and Souliotis, 2019), and a 25% increase of people experiencing homelessness in Greece (Melander, 2011). According to Parsanoglou (2020, p.460), this welfare crisis also led to "the retreat, if not collapse, of the welfare state in austerity-hit Greece". Within this multi-crisis arrival context, the 2015 refugee *reception* crisis was gradually transformed (starting in 2019) into a refugee *integration* crisis, further aggravating the pre-existing multi-crisis milieu. A few years later in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic added another layer to the pre-existing context of intertwined crises. To contain the outbreak of the virus, the Greek Government implemented further restrictions on movement in and out of the hotspots and temporarily shut down (1) the asylum service centre, leaving asylum seekers without proof of application and, thus, obstructing their access to the healthcare system, financial assistance, and labour market, and (2) schools, putting the education of refugee minors on hold due to lack of access to the Internet and digital equipment (Kovner et al., 2021).

Fig. 1 Greece's multi-layered crisis landscape



Source: Authors' elaboration

The multi-layered crisis landscape in Greece was further sketched by a *housing affordability crisis* – especially in Athens – partly due to overtourism and a steep increase in the number of Airbnb rentals—going from 132 in 2010 to 126 231 in 2018 (Maloutas et al., 2020; former local politician, interview, 4 March 2021). This in turn led to the intensification of housing unaffordability for vulnerable groups including both migrants/refugees and Greek citizens (homeless, middle- and low-income groups, youth) due to skyrocketing rent prices and raised property occupation taxes (former local politician, interview, 4 March 2021).

To house the most vulnerable refugees since 2015, two programmes were launched: (1) the "Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation" (in short, ESTIA) administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) until 2020, and (2) the "Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection" (in short, HELIOS) administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Both programmes were temporary in nature, offering short-term accommodation solutions and limited long-term perspectives for migrant integration and autonomous living (Kourachanis, 2019a; Kovner et al., 2021). Local authorities, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, and NGOs were actively involved in the management and implementation of ESTIA and HELIOS. Homelessness NGOs, some of which are also Greek members of the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), such as the case study

homelessness NGO[4], PRAKSIS, and Solidarity Now, were main partners in ESTIA, with Solidarity NOW also being part of the implementation of the HELIOS programme. Homelessness NGOs, thus, emerged as main protagonists of social and housing programme implementation for refugees further facilitating the search for short-term and long-term accommodation for their beneficiaries. The support of homelessness NGOs, beyond housing assistance, included basic needs satisfaction (e.g., food, hygiene, clothes, healthcare), psycho-social and legal services, recreational activities, sports, workshops, education, employment skills, language classes, interpretation services, and intercultural activities (ACCMR, 2020; The HOME Project, 2020), especially witnessed in their programmes for UAMs. Despite their critical role in refugees' housing and integration, NGOs are often characterised by "organisational and financial volatility" due to their financial dependence on donors and the framing of their operation by fixed-term contracts signed with state authorities (Kourachanis, 2024, p.4). In light of such challenges and potentials, the capacity of homelessness NGOs to contribute to resilience-building in the Greek multi-crisis arrival setting remains under-investigated (Kalogeraki, 2020; Kourachanis, 2021).

This paper aims to study resilience in the multi-crisis arrival context of Athens by engaging with the integrative and politico-institutional features of homelessness NGOs in resilience-building processes. The paper specifically delves into the work of a Greek homelessness NGO originally founded in the 1990s to support disadvantaged youth and protect their rights through advocacy. The NGO is financially supported both by public funding (e.g., the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) and private donorship, and who, since 2015, has focused its services and advocacy work on housing and integrating asylum seekers and recognised refugees.

The remainder of the paper is divided into five sections. Section 2 conceptually unravels the interface of resilience, social innovation, and migrant integration. Section 3 explains research methodology and section 4 elaborates on the dynamic integration work and political activity of the case study NGO. Section 5 reflects on the empirical findings and analyses the potentials and limitations of the dual – integrative and politico-institutional – role of the case study in fostering the resilient arrival city. In conclusion, Section 6 offers suggestions on how homelessness NGOs can extend their integrative and politico-institutional impact in post-disaster arrival cities of the future.

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4 This study refrains from mentioning the name of the specific Greek homelessness NGO case study to respect their request for anonymity. Therefore, it will be referred to as 'the case study homelessness NGO', 'the case study NGO', 'the case study', or 'the NGO'.

Conceptual Exploration of the Resilience, Social Innovation, and Migrant Integration Interface

Resilience: An overview of the concept and knowledge gaps

Resilience was originally introduced as an ecological concept by Holling (1996) and understood as the ability of systems to absorb change in a timely manner and still maintain their ongoing functions and controls. Although the concept of resilience, when perceived as a one-time action of the system returning to its original state, is applicable in ecological and structural rebuilding contexts, a system's unchangeable constancy cannot apply to complex social systems involving human actors (Davoudi et al., 2012). As a result, resilience was reconceptualised taking into consideration its socio-spatial, economic, institutional, and political features as well as evolutionary dimensions affecting the ability of a system to cope with crises and recover its pre-shock operational structures. Thus, since the bouncing back to pre-disaster conditions (Wildavski, 1991) lurks the danger of returning to pre-existing vulnerabilities, several scholars highlighted the need to define resilience as the ability to 'bounce forward' to stronger, better, safer, and more socially just human settlements (Cutter et al., 2008; Davoudi et al., 2012; Manyena, 2009). This reconceptualisation further implies the transformation of social learnings and knowledge acquired into new institutional arrangements, (re)organisation of social networks, improved governance schemes, and development strategies (Coccossis et al., 2021; Folke, 2006). In this context of post-disaster social transformation, institutional adaptation, and the call for structural changes, various actors and social groups – underpinned by different value systems and visions for the resilient city – seize the opportunity to increase their capabilities to influence change (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018). This heterogeneity has elevated 'resilience' from a single capacity of a system to resist shock and bounce back or bounce forward in a linear, monodirectional way, to a highly politically sensitive, continuously changing, socially transformative process, with various 'bounce-forward' imaginations and trajectories (e.g., pro-growth or pro-equity) steered by a heterogeneity of recovery agents (for-profit and non-profit housing providers) (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018). More recently, resilience has also been investigated from a migratory perspective in the context of urban transformations (Vains, 2017; Visvizi et al., 2017) and refugee camps (Paidakaki et al., 2021). The latter are considered socially resilient when, on the one hand, they offer a sturdy public camp infrastructure and social infrastructure for social life and recreation and, on the other hand, are governed by a heterogeneity of stakeholders (hegemonic and alternative), who have an equivalent voice and equal space to experiment with their own perceptions of humanitarian aid (Paidakaki et al., 2021).

However, to date, notably few—if any—studies exist scrutinising and critically analysing resilience in the context of new national territories receiving populations displaced by natural or human-induced disasters. In particular, it remains rather understudied how several 'recovery' actors in recipient cities/countries view a humanitarian crisis as an opportunity to foster the resilience of the arrival city. How do these actors help the arrival city bounce forward into the direction of an equity-based urban development and governance by (1) collectively reflecting on the city's pre-existing, underlying, and structural socio-spatial inequalities and ill-defined social urban policies, (2) acting upon and addressing the root causes of long-lived social vulnerability, and (3) working on improved migrant integration and housing-for-all programmes?

In this paper, 'arrival city' refers to the 'virtual arrival city' as explained by the journalist Doug Saunders to address the general places where migrants settle and integrate on a city level. For Saunders (2010, p.18), arrival cities are conceptualised as places that "function to propel people into the core life of the city and to send support back to the next wave of arrivals."

In the scientific discourse on migrants' arrival settlements, the prevalent focus has been on fixed, homogeneous, and clearly delineated enclaves with poor residents and inexpensive dwellings (Meeus et al., 2020). Such socio-spatial phenomena occur in the form of human settlements with a clear physical demarcation such as slum quarters (e.g., bidonvilles, favelas, shanty towns), ethnic districts or immigrant neighbourhoods, or in the form of less demarcated settlements, such as larger urban territories across which newcomers are spatially spread out and interwoven within the urban tissue (Knox and Pinch, 2014; Saunders, 2016 cited in Meeus et al., 2020).

On the whole, arrival cities are much more than the particularities of the built environment and their socio-cultural inclusion-exclusion implications (Ye and Yeoh, 2022). As Wilson (2022, p.3459) aptly observes, an arrival city "is far from stable, being continuously reworked by state policy, geopolitics, economic fluctuations or localised events that rupture or destabilise what came before." Arrival cities further encompass a set of resources managed through formal and informal mechanisms, and the deployment of networks to underpin social interactions, refugees' integration, and political representation; all shaping a distinct social and institutional capital (Saunders, 2010). This, in turn, together with critical infrastructure (administrative, economic, physical, etc.) frame the capacity of the city to operationalise and implement appropriate policies and measures for refugee integration and bounce forward to the (re)establishment of resilient urban structures. The arrival city can therefore be described as an infrastructural basis that underpins sharing and exchange of knowledge and resources between local communities, previously arrived migrants, and newcomers (Hanhörster and Wessendorf, 2020). Sidney

(2019) highlights the role of NGOs as elements of 'arrival infrastructure' since they are mediating between newcomers and local governments to facilitate the provision of housing and a series of legal procedures. In this dynamic context, our paper raises the questions: What can then be defined as a *resilient arrival city*? And how are homelessness NGOs actively involved in enabling resilience-building processes in the arrival city? To conceptualise 'the resilient arrival city' we bridge theories of social innovation with migrant integration literature.

Unfolding the resilient arrival city: Insights from social innovation

Resilience thinking is intertwined with governance conceptualisations, as it reflects, on the one hand, on normative guidelines formulated by the state at different policy levels to support disaster recovery, and on the other hand, on bottom-up socially innovative initiatives by communities and voluntary organisations aiming to cover institutional voids and satisfy acute human needs that are often unmanageable by the state. Crises and disasters trigger necessities that force civil society to self-organise, while the state apparatus may provide institutional mechanisms, through which several socially innovative actors can unfold their potential contribution to resilience-building (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). Can social innovation, however, have a socio-political transformative impact in a post-disaster context? According to post-political scholars (e.g., Metzger 2011; Mouffe, 1999; Swyngedouw and Wilson, 2014), social innovation can only have limited potential for socio-political transformation because of 'caring neoliberal' views of social innovation whereby the welfare state is shrunk in budget and social responsibility and pre-selected civic society groups (NGOs, business groups) provide low-cost social services (Paidakaki et al., 2018). In governance terms, according to Paidakaki et al. (2018, p.12), "this paradigm translates into a-political, techno-managerial and consensus-oriented elitist governance arrangements that cultivate politically modest social service providers and pre-define linear and mono-directional urban development trajectories that ultimately sharpen inequality in urban society."

However, scholars of radical social innovation who belong to the broader tradition of critical studies (Eizaguirre et al., 2012; García et al., 2015; Moulaert et al., 2013; Oosterlynck et al., 2013a; b; Pradel et al., 2013) stress the political nature of innovative initiatives taken by civil society organisations, and put emphasis on solidarity, empowerment, and criticism against the socio-economic inconsistencies and disrupting (social, cultural, environmental) consequences of neoliberal urban development (Moulaert et al., 2007 in Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018). According to this scholarship, socially innovative organisations trigger transformational change by initiating micro-initiatives on the basis of solidarity that establishes new collaborations between organisations and sectors, forms new arenas, and works out alternative strategies for socio-spatial development (Paidakaki et al., 2018). To ensure a

lasting impact of their initiatives, social innovators are embedded in bottom-linked governance structures with the aim to force decision- and policy-makers to "(1) create new mechanisms for the provision of resources, (2) imagine new ways of conceptualising and approaching policy problems, and (3) engage with and empower a wider range of policy implementers and civic actors to develop socially innovative practices" (Pradel et al., 2013 in Paidakaki et al., 2018, p.14). Thus, bottom-linked governance, as a new and dynamic governance arrangement between top-down receptive decision- and policymakers and bottom-up social innovators aiming for human need satisfaction, public policy co-construction and the formation of participatory decision-making mechanisms, becomes a transversal institutionalisation of social change (Paidakaki et al., 2018; Paidakaki and Lang, 2021).

According to Moulaert et al. (2010), the following three main forms of change should be achieved – alone or in combination – for social innovation to eventually have a 'successful' and lasting impact: (1) *the satisfaction of human needs* (material and immaterial); (2) *the empowerment of marginalised social groups* through protection of their rights, enhancement of capabilities, and the (re)creation of visions/culture/identity; and (3*) changes in social, power, and/ or governance relations* within the community, and between the community and society at large. The goal of social innovation also extends to providing inventively improved conditions that further foster social cohesion (Van Dyck and Van den Broeck, 2013). Social innovation literature can thus provide an instrumental framework with socio-political, ideological, and ethical properties (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019) to complement resilience discourses and thoroughly unravel post-disaster transformations (Westley, 2013) and social processes that lead to new/post-crisis governance cultures. In this context, a post-disaster/crisis socially innovative governance shift creates an opportunity for the design of a new, more just political economy, and for a reinvented role of the state within a bottom-linked governance form (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). In such productive governance environments, bottom-up initiatives and voluntary organisations find fertile ground to claim for a more equitable provision of goods and services (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018).

Due to the intrinsic bottom-up and solidarity-based character of socially innovative practices, the main leaders of social innovation amidst crisis times are mainly non-governmental/non-profit organisations, including those belonging in the homelessness sector (Paidakaki, 2021). These actors not only implement social policies to tackle (urgent) social problems, but also organise themselves discursively and actively in their aim to address the root causes of social vulnerabilities and influence the recovery profile of a post-disaster city (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2017). NGOs are especially quick to activate themselves in times of crisis to respond to urgent and growing/massive social needs. With time, they raise issues of institutional

dysfunctionalities, such as social policy gaps, exclusive governance structures, and deficiencies of top-down decision-making mechanisms (Moulaert et al., 2019; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2022).

In a migratory context, homelessness NGOs steer novel governance arrangements seeking an improved provision of goods and services varying from food and housing facilities to educational activities and programmes supporting a multifaceted integration of refugees in the arrival cities (Paidakaki, 2021). Homelessness NGOs mobilise their know-how, as well as their horizontal and vertical networking, to build strong bottom-up corps with a political voice (*intra-level governance*) and advocacy groups that allow them to participate in policymaking and bring about bottom-linked governance reconfigurations (*inter-level governance*) (Paidakaki, 2021; Paidakaki and Lang, 2021). By politicising themselves and working collectively, they call for radical changes in dominant institutional structures shaped in a context of increasing financialisation of welfare services and neoliberal reforms; the latter being intertwined with the root causes of humanitarian crises (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017). In this context, NGOs' responses are often constrained by the state's managerial approach to dealing with crises –'justified' by the nature of emergency landscapes–, project-based funding, rapid implementation timelines, and related policy restrictions. As a matter of fact, in most cases the access of NGOs to resources and infrastructure depends on state or private actors highly affecting the NGO's operation, impact, and capacity to trigger institutional and political change. However, refugee crises activate funding schemes at national and international levels that are channelled through NGOs based in arrival cities, create political synergies and 'infrastructures of solidarity' (Schilliger, 2021), and enable legal and bureaucratic changes that facilitate NGOs' field of action (Parsanoglou, 2020). This creates opportunities for materialising a socially innovative transition in a radicalised neowelfare governance regime (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). Therefore, the socially innovative nature of NGOs plays a critical role in resilience building, and in the improvement of the recipient city's institutional capacity to satisfy human needs and facilitate refugees' smooth integration in new socio-cultural environments.

Resilience through migrant integration lenses

The concept of migrant integration appeared in academic and policy debates in the 20th-century post-World War context (Phillimore, 2021). It was originally considered part of classical assimilation theories (i.e., Warner & Strole, 1945), which assumed migrant settlement and incorporation through social processes into the dominant way of life in society. This approach was reshaped by scholarly criticism of the conception of a *mainstream society/culture* that assumes a homogenous social environment (in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, social norms, etc.), strengthened by empirical research findings uncovering structural inequalities that hinder integra-

tion (e.g., injustices in gaining access to the labour and housing markets), the existence of a plurality of integration processes depending on collective actors (communities, civil society, state, etc.), and contextual actors (such as economic situation). Migrant integration was then perceived as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (Penninx and Garcés-Mascarenas, 2016, p.14), which is conceptually rooted in the 'cohesive society' of Durkheim (1893). The association of integration with social cohesion is also apparent in a number of international integration policies (Council of Europe, 2008; International Organization for Migration, 2017).

Preston et al. (2022) adopt a critical approach to analyse migrants' integration as a social component of resilience since it encompasses processes that contribute to the development of diverse, solidarity-based, and socially just societies. The same authors underline the roles of governmental and non-profit organisations in supporting a smooth transition of newcomers into new ways of life, even when unpredictable challenges—like Covid-19 pandemics – emerge. The adaptability and effectiveness of those organisations form part of a wider socio-institutional capacity to respond to crises and move towards better-prepared communities. Moreover, the multi-levelness of migrant integration needs and policies demands complex governance arrangements that go beyond state-centred coordination mechanisms and triggers polycentric and multi-actor collaborations (Scholten et al., 2017). Such governance reconfigurations distance themselves from a neoliberal state characterised by a top-down hierarchy, the promotion of profit-oriented activities, and shrinkage of public spending for social welfare which often result in a constrained resilience potential. Instead, they contribute to resilience building by nurturing a neowelfare state, the primary purpose of which is to facilitate the mobilisation and sufficient capitalisation of civil society actors for the production of social goods and services for all (Swyngedouw and Jessop, 2006; Scholten, 2013 cited in Penninx and Garces-Mascarenas, 2016; Manganelli and Moulaert, 2018; Paidakaki and Parra, 2018).

The analysis of integration is often broken down into three main domains: the *socio-economic* domain covering employment, education, housing, health, and social inclusion; the *legal-political* domain referring to rights and citizenship; and the *cultural* domain including language and religion (Hynie, 2018). Access to a variety of employment sectors (Ager and Strang, 2008; Martín et al., 2016), education, housing, and health (Philips, 2013; Ziersch and Due, 2018), as well as equal citizenship rights and social connections (Ager and Strang, 2008) have also been underlined as crucial integration factors. Although several frames have been put forward to analyse integration outcomes and guide the development of coherent integration policies, the nexus between integration and resilience remains weak both in terms of theoretical and policy explorations (Walther et al., 2021). In order to examine the nexus between integration and resilience building, this study adopts the definition

of successful integration formulated by Hynie et al. (2016), who explain that integration can be studied on the basis of eight domains being: (1) *social connections*; (2) *functional integration,* which covers access to education, affordable and safe housing, stable employment, and health services; (3) *language adaptation* that facilitates other integration aspects such as social connections, education, and employment; (4) *institutional adaptation*, meant as necessary practice and policy changes by agencies and institutions; (5) *community welcome,* covering media discourse, beliefs, and attitudes among the larger community and general public; (6) *cultural integration* that consists of working knowledge of cultural and social norms and expectations in the new society; (7) s*afety and security*; and (8) *sense of belonging* referring to the subjective feeling at home and perceived social status within communities.

Methodology

The resilience-bolstering potential of homelessness NGOs in the arrival city is empirically tested with evidence from the integration and advocacy work of the case study homelessness NGO in the arrival city of Athens in Greece. Empirical data were collected during fieldwork conducted in 2021. More specifically, the study was conducted in one of the case study's shelters located in the centre of Athens housing 28 male UAMs (Afghans, Syrians, Bengalis, Pakistanis, and Gambians) and run by various professionals. In preparation for the fieldwork in Athens, a desk study was conducted to gain insight into Greece's multiple crisis context (2009 debt crisis; 2015 refugee crisis; 2018 housing affordability crisis; 2020 Covid-19 crisis) and the reception/accommodation facilities for UAMs offered by social and homelessness NGOs. This desk research included a review of academic papers and documents harvested in data portals (i.e., Eurostat, IMF, Worldometer), reports and policy papers (i.e., United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), European Commission (EC), Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), NGOs), web research on NGOs, and newspaper articles. Additionally, document analysis was carried out regarding the case study's partnerships with other homelessness and social NGOs, UAMs education policy, as well as on legal issues regarding UAMs procedures (e.g., family reunification), advocacy and service networks, and the Covid-19 impact on collective initiatives such as the 'Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee Issues' (in short, ACCMR[5]). With the aim of shedding light on the integration and

[5] ACCMR is a network of over 150 member-organisations covering a wide range of organisations, such as municipal and state authorities, local and international NGOs, International Organisations, refugee and migrant fora, and International Institutions working together for the promotion of the social integration of immigrants and refugees (https://www.accmr.gr/en/).

politico-institutional role of the case-study NGO in resilience-building processes in the context of the arrival city of Athens, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key officers from the shelter and collaborating politicians (empirical categories incl. shelter functioning, location, and neighbourhood; facilitation of integration; historic and future development of services and alliances of the case study NGO; and Covid-19 impact), an anonymous questionnaire was handed out to 10 male UAMs living in the shelter (empirical categories incl. demographics, accommodation history, social connections, emotional well-being and safety/ security feeling, and future aspirations), and informal discussions were realised with UAMs, staff, and professionals working in the shelter.

Integration and Resilience-Building in the Arrival City of Athens, Greece

History and context of integration policy in Greece

Greek history is characterised by a long-standing experience in receiving refugees and responding to their acute social and housing needs. Indicatively, after the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) a wave of more than one million refugees, mainly from Asia Minor, arrived in Greece, triggering the establishment of the Refugees Resettlement Committee to undertake the management of loans and the formulation of policies for the settlement of refugees and their incorporation in the labour market (especially in the agricultural and industrial sector). However, such an experience did not result in the development of an improved integration and housing policy system; refugee inflows have rather been addressed in an emergency response rationale (Kourachanis, 2018; 2019a) leading to an inadequate physical and institutional infrastructure. Following a decision of the European Court of Human Rights in 2011 that detected the lack of policies and administrative practices to support asylum seekers in Greece, the first integrated legal frameworks emerged for the establishment of the Asylum Agency (Law 3907/2011), and later for the temporary receptions and accommodation facilities for the asylum seekers (Law 4172/2013) and the social integration of migrants (Law 4251/2014). In the aftermath of the debt crisis, the austerity measures that led to spending cuts on social policies and public services and the wider lack of political will significantly delayed the administrative implementation of migration laws (Kourachanis, 2019b).

The Greek state started organising the migration and integration institutional and policy setting in the aftermath of the 2015 'refugee crisis'. In 2016, significant legislative measures were enacted to address institutional gaps. Law 4375/2016 focused on the accommodation of asylum seekers, while Law 4368/2016 introduced the establishment of Migrant Integration Centres at the municipal level. Additionally,

the role of NGOs was institutionally recognised, and a registration system for NGOs working in international protection, immigration, and social integration was implemented under Ministerial Decree 39487/2016. At the European level, the 2016 Action Plan on the Integration and Inclusion (APII) – which was later amended in 2021 – strongly supported the active involvement of NGOs and their cooperation with state authorities and other EU-level networks to coordinate and implement integration policies and to mediate between civil society and the states (APII, Paragraph 4.2.1). Although the Greek National Integration Strategy (2013, amended in 2019 and 2021) asks for a dialogue platform (Paragraph 3.2.6.2) and an enhanced role of civil society organisations in the integration process (Action 1.2/11) of including NGOs in the list of integration policies' implementers, it focuses on the determination of different state authorities' competences and obligations creating an unclear environment for the actions and contributions of NGOs. The Joint Ministerial Decree 3063/2020 that determines the operation of NGOs mainly describes the registration process and the official recognition of NGOs, rather than their actions in the refugees' integration phase. As far as the regulatory framework related to UAMs is concerned, it was in 2022 that the National Guardianship System and Accommodation Framework was legally determined (Laws 4939/2022 and 4960/2022). The shortcomings of the Greek state that led to a delayed legal and administrative response to refugees' needs, and the gaps in social services provision that were accentuated by austerity policies were often addressed by an increasing number of NGOs reacting fast and mobilising networked know-how to deal with humanitarian crisis (Bagavos and Kourachanis, 2022; Sotiropoulos and Bourikos, 2014).

The politico-institutional work of the case study NGO

The case study homelessness NGO has always been a politically active organisation aiming to influence policy through advocacy, lobbying, and public campaigning, either individually as a single organisation or collectively through their participation in several networks and coalitions. In terms of its collective advocacy work, the NGO actively participates in local, Greek, European, and international network initiatives (e.g., ACCMR, DISYN, FEANTSA, PICUM), aspiring to bundle and exchange advocacy experiences/ideas and promote common goals (NGO website, 2021). For this purpose, the NGO allocates one (or two) different spokespersons to each network so that every executive builds up specific network expertise and shares their knowledge with the other NGO members (shelter coordinator, interview, 16 March 2021). Among these networks, of specific importance for the arrival city of Athens in terms of collaborations (e.g., shared social services/ activities/ resources and collective advocacy) and know-how exchange is ACCMR, an initiative by the city of Athens, which, since 2017 when it was established, connects different NGOs (local, national, and international) among each other and with

municipal authorities and elected officials, developing and strengthening intra-level interactions within the non-governmental/humanitarian sector, and creating bottom-linked interactions with public authorities and elected officials. By putting all these actors around a table in theme-based working groups (e.g., legal, health, gender, urbanisation, etc.) and plenary sessions, the city of Athens has enabled coordination in support of refugee integration.

> We collaborate with NGOs who operate under similar funding frameworks (25% Greek government, 75% EU), by (1) advocating collectively through petitions and letters to address issues such as pushbacks, delayed social security numbers, reunification processes, and integration funding, while (2) also coordinating shared services to improve integration plans.[…] We believe when we all speak together our voice is much stronger. And that we have made a very big difference on the Greek society's perception of migration. – Shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021)

Beyond ACCMR, the case study, together with other NGOs, has strategised its collective agency also through joint statements on social media, shared petitions, and open letters to governmental authorities. By co-signing public documents with others, the NGO and its peers have aimed to form one loud collective voice:

- On the *national* level, to ask through an open letter to the then Minister on Migration and Asylum for improvements in the governmental healthcare policy on issues like financial support and health insurance for migrants as well as to address delays in processing social security numbers for UAMs (shelter coordinator, interview, 16 March 2021; NGO website, 2021). As a result of this collective advocacy effort, the social security application process was accelerated.
- On the European level, to raise several issues (e.g., criminalisation of migrant solidarity, UAM's protection, relocation from Reception and Identification Centres) via joint statements and open letters directed to the Greek Prime Minister, the Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum, and the presidents of the European Council, Commission, and Parliament.[6] In 2019, the Greek Housing Network, in which the study NGO is a member, together with FEANTSA, released

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6 The EU's criminalisation of migrant/refugee solidarity co-signed by 101 NGOs (i.e., FEANTSA, Red Cross EU, SolidarityNow, Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen) on July 26, 2019; "Children remain invisible" (demanding clarification about UAM procedures in the Reception and Identification Centers, protection, psychosocial support and special care, family reunification processes, etc.) co-signed by 21, mainly Greek, NGOs (e.g., PRAKSIS and SolidarityNow) on March 16, 2020; The urgent UAM relocation away from the Reception and Identification Centers on the Greek islands to other EU Member States due to Covid-19 co-signed by 67 NGOs (e.g., Amnesty International, METAdrasi, PRAKSIS, SolidarityNow) on April 3, 2020 (NGO website, 2021).

> a joint declaration calling upon the European Commission to ensure housing to all asylum seekers. In the letter, the welfare crisis context of Greece was also highlighted: "The national welfare system is not adequately equipped to host and support recognised refugees, with the lack of any social housing provision for both locals and newcomers being a fundamental gap" (FEANTSA, 2019, p.1).
>
> There is a growing need for the Greek government to focus more on integration, as the country is no longer in a state of emergency like in 2015 when thousands of people arrived seeking basic necessities such as shelter and food. It is now widely recognised that many migrants are here to stay, and Greece is no longer solely a transit country but increasingly a destination for those rebuilding their lives. – Shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021)

During the times of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, this collective advocacy action was reactivated in a virtual (online) way focusing on issues concerning domestic violence, stress, and mental health among the refugee community (Spyratou, 2020).

In a nutshell, the case study, together with peer homelessness and other NGOs, politically activated themselves during the 2015 'refugee crisis' and the 2020 public health crisis to facilitate refugee integration. Their advocacy action brought back the issue of the lack of long-term social/affordable housing structures and migrant social/integration facilities (e.g., access to citizenship, healthcare, education, employment) on the political agenda and into public debate. However, so far, no crisis has become a turning point for inducing radical social and housing policy reforms or tackling long-standing structural problems (e.g., poverty, homelessness, social exclusion), which can be attributed to a polarised society and limitedly responsive elected officials by both the left-wing (2015-2019) and the right-wing Greek administrations (2019-2021) (shelter teacher, interview, 20 March 2021). In addition, international organisations (e.g., IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR) who played a dominant role in managing the 2015 refugee crisis – often substituting the state and in cooperation with local social and homelessness NGOs – have been gradually withdrawing from Greece or shifting their focus to more recent disruptive events (e.g., Covid-19 crisis) (shelter coordinator, interview, 16 March 2021).

The integration work of the case study NGO

Since 2015, the NGO has been accommodating housing and social needs of asylum seekers and refugees by running housing programmes (e.g., provision of accommodation in safe zones, SIL apartments, and shelters for UAMs or single-parent families), offering psycho-social and education support (e.g., legal advice, liaison with social services, Greek and English language courses), preparing migrants for the labour market (e.g., soft skills development, vocational training, career counsel-

ling, job search, work placement support, workshops, social enterprise initiatives), and fostering socialisation and recreational activities (e.g., leisure activities, sports, creative art workshops, exhibitions, cultural events, city visits, theatre).

In light of the eight domains of successful integration by Hynie et al. (2016) in the area of shelter, the NGO showed specifically strong performance in six domains. Firstly, regarding *social connections*, it aimed to foster friendships between minors of the same nationality or ethnic background through bedroom arrangements and strengthened cross-national friendships by organising sports and recreational activities. Secondly, the NGO responded to *functional integration* by the provision of comfortable housing, access to health services, and enrolment of each UAM into a local Greek school. The case study supported minors in continuing their studies at least until they have completed the first year of the non-compulsory Lyceum. From then on, 16-year-olds are eligible for employment support by the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (European Commission, 2021) from which UAMs receive financial support to gain access to further education or participate in a skills training programme (e.g., computer skills) (Greek Council for Refugees, 2020). However, according to the shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021), there is no provision of tailored educational programmes for UAMs over 16 who face language barriers, particularly in training areas, and limited support to help pursue higher education or gain access to university, further hindering their long-term educational and professional integration.

> We have a significant gap in state schools offering needs-based education adapted to limited language proficiency and skill training programmes for young adults (e.g., cooking, tailor profession, etc.), for which many of our boys show high interest. – Shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021)

> As an adult past 18 years, in Norway, for example, they provide language classes and support in finding your first job. Because if you don't have a job, you are out. Here, there is a gap. After you get accepted in Greece, going from illegal to registered status, there is nothing and you end up on your own. You get support for one or two months and that's it. – Social worker (interview, 21 March 2023)

Thirdly, as an attempt to close this gap, and in addition to the previous, the shelter teacher and caregivers offered additional *language* support and used to collaborate with another NGO for e.g., sewing, arts, mobile phone repairment, and bike repairment lessons before Covid-19 (shelter teacher, interview, 20 March 2021). Fourthly, concerning *institutional adaptation*, the NGO internally and flexibly adapted its UAM integration programmes based on input from minors and other NGOs. They gathered this input from the minors themselves in so-called 'community meetings' when minors voice ideas for policy or practice improvements (e.g., organising more cooking activities, rescheduling bed/mealtime, discussing Covid-19 movement

restrictions) as well as from personal relations with peer NGOs (e.g., PRAKSIS and METAdrasi) and the multi-partner network of ACCMR whereby resources (e.g., musical instruments, books, clothes, food, sports, and craft equipment) as well as best practices are shared. Fifthly, the NGO was active in *cultural integration* through the organisation of city visits together with social workers that show UAMs Greek shops, and attendance to free public cultural events (e.g., traditional Syrian and Afghan dancing) by several NGOs (e.g., members of ACCMR). Finally, *safety and security* were ensured spatially and economically. The shelter was equipped with locks, cameras at the entrance, and 24/7 surveillance. The case study also handed out weekly pocket money, allowing UAMs to buy snacks and personal items (e.g., Greek street food, coffee, energy drinks, cigarettes, games). The shelter coordinator (interview, 16 March 2021) stressed the fact that a child has the right to be a child, and that childhood represents a unique fundamental period in one's life that never returns. Based on such rationale, the organisation sought to ensure that the minors temporarily do not need to worry about money and work, encouraging them to focus on education and wellbeing.

The homelessness NGO was less effective in the integration domains of *community welcome* and *sense of belonging*. With respect to *community welcome*, while consciously choosing to locate its shelters in central and multicultural areas, the NGO did not sufficiently foster relations between minors and the general pre-existing inhabitant group apart from the local school community. The questionnaire and informal discussions with UAMs revealed that the minors did not feel welcome in Athens and even less in that specific neighbourhood. They brought up several experiences of racial or hateful remarks on the street in confrontation with Greek citizens. To tackle such anti-migrant sentiments, the NGO documented and communicated facts and positive migrant stories mainly on public social media platforms. Another domain covered less productively by the case study was *a sense of belonging*, referring to feeling at home and feeling part of a community. The cultivation of feeling at home was not prioritised since the organisation attaches more importance to instantaneous wellbeing. According to the organisation's psychologist (interview, 20 March 2021), the homelessness NGO cannot set such a goal because the shelter is considered a continuously changing transition phase.

> Home means many things such as family and stability, this is not the same, because this is a place where many things continuously change; both the inhabitants and the staff […] So we try, -as long as they are here-, to make them feel well, safe, and comfortable to maintain sincerity in our relationship and show mutual respect. – psychologist (interview, 20 March 2021)

> Integration within a safe zone is not feasible due to the lack of stable conditions. It represents only the initial step, with the shelter still acting as a transitional space, a bridge. If the SIL apartment system functions effectively, it becomes the most optimal environment for integration out of the three, as it allows individuals to achieve greater independence and autonomy—whether they remain here or relocate elsewhere. – psychologist (interview, 20 March 2021)

Nevertheless, the case study did empower the minors to own the shelter during their stay by allowing homemaking practices like traditional cooking (e.g., taste of home country) and personal wall decoration (e.g., drawings, posters, pictures, crafts work), occasional one-on-one gatherings, and the previously mentioned community meetings. Focusing on a sense of community, the case study – in cooperation with other NGOs (e.g., members of ACCMR) – organised free public weekend activities in the arrival city (e.g., non-formal education, theatre, food, sports, music concerts in parks or squares) in pre-Covid-19 times. However, according to the caregiver (interview, 8 April 2021), these extra-curriculum activities were highly attended by migrants and refugees and almost zero Greek citizens, except for NGO staff. Consequently, meeting and including same-age Greek people in this community was a challenging issue.

Revealing the Resilience-Building Potential and Limitations of Homelessness NGOs in the Multi-Crisis Arrival City

Potential for fostering the resilient arrival city through socially innovative initiatives

As evidenced in our case study, homelessness NGOs intensified advocacy at the national level in the emergence of bureaucratic impediments that caused delays in the implementation of their integration programmes, and at the EU level for the UAM relocation from refugee camps and safe zones to more decent accommodation in the mainland of Greece and other European countries. Homelessness NGOs also recognised the value of coalescing with peer organisations to increase their influential capacity when interacting with multi-level public authorities and elected officials. Their inter-linked interactions and influential capacity were also bolstered by igniting public debate on social and public policy gaps and needs. Through shared platforms, such as ACCMR, homelessness NGOs co-nurtured bottom-linked governance fermentations by strengthening their municipality ties within the arrival city and expanding them to the national level (ministries of social affairs, migration, health) and international/European level (European Commission, DG ECHO, DG HOME).

While the Greek state grappled with multiple socio-economic crises, a growing number of NGOs stepped in, offering socially innovative solutions either independently or through coordinated networks to help addressing refugee crisis. Homelessness NGOs, first, contributed to fulfilling unmet human needs, while state organisations lagged behind. Second, they empowered vulnerable and marginalised refugee communities by amplifying their voices, representing their interests, and facilitating their integration into the social fabric of the arrival city. This confirms what Sidney (2019) had already observed, namely that NGOs become an integral part of the 'arrival infrastructure' enhancing the city's capacity to integrate refugees and cover their basic needs effectively. Third, these civil-society organisations not only provided immediate support but also advocated for the necessary legal and administrative reforms –hence triggering governance changes–, enabling the arrival city to 'bounce forward' to more resilient structures and improve its capacity to respond effectively to similar crises leveraging the acquired know-how for lasting impact. Over time, these efforts contributed to the enactment of new laws that recognised the pivotal role of NGOs and sought to regulate and coordinate their operations. The contribution of NGOs extends beyond immediate crisis response to fostering a neowelfare state model, wherein civil society actors are mobilised and empowered to deliver essential social goods and services.

Homelessness NGOs also aimed at integrating UAMs into Greek society through the development of their capacity to live autonomously and the design of integration programmes with a holistic approach, encompassing functional need coverage (e.g., housing, education, employment, health), intense psycho-social support, legal assistance, and socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge. Regarding the selection of housing units to rent, homelessness NGOs chose strategic and central locations with easy access to various ethnic communities, social services providers/ public authorities, schools, and training centres, to further boost the integration of refugees. Homelessness NGOs also facilitated smoother integration by cross-fertilising each other's resources and strengthening strategic partnerships to achieve improved social service delivery for refugees in and through their interactions in their networks and personal connections built up in the field. By organising free public events for native residents and newcomers in cooperation with municipal authorities, homelessness NGOs did not only foster refugee integration, but also the cultivation of social cohesion, equality, and diversity in the arrival city.

Limitations in fostering the resilient arrival city through socially innovative initiatives

So far, the arrival city of Athens had repetitively experienced several crisis events from 2009 until 2021. Nevertheless, no crisis became a turning point for homelessness NGOs to tackle long-standing social problems or promote structural radical reforms in social and housing policy in Greece that would guarantee housing and social services for all. Especially the refugee reception and integration crisis did not prove to be the momentum for homelessness NGOs to be more politically strong because of the politically and socially polarised society between bottom-up solidarity movements of NGOs and anti-migrant citizen groups. Moreover, both the left-wing and the right-wing Greek administrations were less open to interacting with the homelessness NGOs. With little or no direct communication (platforms) between the NGOs and governmental ministries, no comprehensive bottom-linked governance form could arise despite the promising connection-building initiatives on the local arrival city level (e.g., ACCMR). Furthermore, homelessness NGOs seemed to over-resort to conservative advocacy tools (e.g., calls, mails, open letters) instead of exploring a wider range of innovative and radical instruments for alliance and claim-making (e.g., through larger partnerships and networks of social actors). As far as refugee integration is concerned, homelessness NGOs could not fulfil the potential of their holistic approach to refugee integration in the face of anti-migrant sentiments and the lack of interest by locals in joining community events for the refugee and the local community.

This limited transformative capacity of homelessness NGOs aligns with the broader critique that social innovation often has constrained potential for socio-political transformation (Swyngedouw, 2016). This is rooted in 'caring neoliberal' perspectives on social innovation, wherein the neowelfare state is diminished in both budget and social responsibility, and pre-selected civic society groups (e.g., NGOs, business organisations) are tasked with delivering low-cost social services. NGOs are often seen as 'policy implementers' constrained within project-based funding and managerial solutions that have limited impact on institutional shortcomings. However, their alliance-building, politically active nature, and advocacy at various policy tiers allow them to organise themselves vertically and horizontally and influence governance and service provision.

Conclusions

In this paper, we bridged studies of resilience with literature of migrant integration and social innovation to conceptualise the *resilient arrival city*. Our analysis suggests that a resilient arrival city is *a city that views a crisis as an opportunity to address pre-existing failures or voids in welfare public policies and outdated governance arrangements (hierarchical or paternalistic) and bounces forwards in the direction of bottom-linked and neowelfare governance configurations and the production of cities for all*. In this resilient arrival city, homelessness NGOs – as equal development and welfare provision partners – steer novel governance formations through intense network building and collaborations with the aim of ensuring sufficient provision of housing and social goods and services for all (migrants and native populations alike). Moreover, in the resilient arrival city, resilience entails empowering displaced individuals experiencing homelessness who receive the appropriate support to develop their capacity to live autonomously while remaining socially connected within their host communities, and gain uninterrupted access to safe and affordable housing, education, and healthcare services.

Based on lessons learned from the case study in Athens, the paper revealed that homelessness NGOs can bolster the resilient arrival city through the formation of novel, more democratic governance arrangements and the implementation of refugee integration programmes. By strengthening and extending their network connections, as well as intensifying their collective advocacy work to national and international governmental bodies, NGOs build up a political voice and continue to extend their reach to maximise their impact on decision making and implementation. Homelessness NGOs' potential in fostering the resilient arrival city also lies in reaping the fruits of their long-standing expertise and personal connections built up in the field since the inception of a crisis, offering holistic integration programmes and housing solutions for refugees and UAMs in central and strategic locations. Moreover, socially innovative actions led by homelessness NGOs carry the possibility of improving the living conditions and personal development of the displaced individuals through a smooth integration process towards an empowered and independent adult life.

While social innovation literature highlights the role of NGOs in addressing gaps left by the state, it underscores the risk of operating within a framework that shifts responsibility from the state to civic actors, reinforcing a charitable, crisis-management approach rather than fostering structural change. Our case study showed that this risk is indeed real when NGOs rely on outdated advocacy tools (e.g., calls, letters, petitions) with limited impact on policy making. They also depend on systemic institutions to access financial resources and finetune the time span and operational guidelines of their work to meet programming guidelines. In this way,

NGOs are often politically instrumentalised and co-opted by a neoliberal framework of action (Kourachanis, 2024). This framing may inadvertently legitimise current socio-economic conditions instead of challenging them, reinforcing the erosion of social rights and the depoliticisation of welfare provision. Although the socially innovative actions of homelessness NGOs hold significant potential in supporting refugees' integration and empowerment, their 'project-based' and 'emergency-response' orientation channelled by neoliberal states limits their capacity to trigger structural changes in social and housing policymaking. However, since their role is institutionally acknowledged –even when it is politically instrumentalised–, and their innovative practices attract new funds (Kourachanis, 2024) that can support their continuation, homelessness NGOs' scaling up consolidates a strong political agency and constant call for improved welfare provision systems. This forms part of resilience building in arrival cities that aim to 'bounce forward' to the production of social goods and services for all through the continuous mobilisation of civil society actors. To achieve true transformation, NGOs must move beyond crisis management and engage in systemic change by forging broader alliances and advocating for structural reforms that challenge the root causes of social exclusion and displacement.

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Precariousness and Marginality of People Experiencing Homelessness in Athens: Pathways In and Through the Street

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Abstract_ *The study examines visible homelessness in post-crisis Athens using a distinctive pathways method—applied here for the first time in the Greek context. Drawing on 74 case studies of people living on the streets or in shelters, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, centred around the temporal dimensions of homelessness, integrating biographical interviews, ethnographic observation, and quantitative analysis. The analysis identified nine pathways, along with critical transitions into and through homelessness. Two broader processes of marginalisation also emerged: psychoactive substance users tend to "drift along" homelessness, while the majority of non-users "drop into" it suddenly. The findings highlight how prolonged exposure to violence and suffering, alongside the unique interaction of other key drivers, with transformations in the Southern European welfare regime, creates conditions where a habitus of precariousness evolves into a habitus of marginality. This study provides insights that hint at the limitations of short-term intervention strategies and the need for more comprehensive, long-term policy approaches.*

Keywords_ *Homelessness, pathways, mixed methods, precariousness, marginality, social suffering*

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Introduction

This study examines the pathways into and through visible homelessness in post-crisis Athens, under the consideration of precariousness and marginality. This marks the first application of a comprehensive pathways approach to homelessness research in Greece, enriching the limited body of knowledge on this topic in the Southern European context. In order to detect and reflect upon the ways that precariousness and marginality shape the life trajectories and experiences of the homeless, this article proposes a distinctive pathways approach (see Sommerville, 2013; Clapham, 2003; Anderson and Tulloch, 2000).

This research examines how individuals experience and navigate homelessness, revealing distinct patterns of marginalisation and the critical role of prolonged violence and suffering in shaping these pathways. The research advances understanding of contemporary urban homelessness through three primary contributions. First, it develops a distinctive methodological framework that integrates temporal dimensions with processes of social marginalisation. Through the synthesis of life trajectories, focusing on housing trajectories, utilising biographical research and ethnographic methods, the study initially employs quantitative and then mixed analysis to identify patterns of pathways and critical transitions in homeless experiences. Second, it empirically documents how transformations in the Southern European welfare regime, particularly its neoliberalisation and precarisation, and accompanying changes in homeless support services, produce key drivers that shape these pathways. Third, it reveals two distinct processes of marginalisation: a gradual descent among substance users and rapid push toward the streets and the margins for non-users and thus shows how a habitus of precariousness, moulded by economic crisis and welfare state reform, can grow into a more established habitus of marginality through extended exposure to violence and suffering.

In this attempt to link the interactive processes between reaching a state of homelessness and the actual experience of it, the essence of the research rests on the premise that homelessness should be regarded as a temporal process instead of a static condition (Clapham, 2003; Somerville, 2013; Mayock et. al., 2021). This temporal perspective recognises that homelessness is intricately connected to broader social, cultural, and economic processes that connect past and present experiences (Farrugia and Gerrard, 2016, p.269). Therefore, its comprehensive understanding necessitates its contextualisation (Pleace, 2016 p.36).

Through this lens, homelessness emerges as a dynamic, multidimensional, and at times long-term process of precarisation, produced within the context of broader economic and social transformations and affecting, beyond housing, all realms of

human existence. This framework allows for an examination of both the conditions that lead to homelessness and the meanings, views, and practices that individuals develop in response to their circumstances.

Greece: Economic Crisis and Its Lasting Impact on the Homeless

The Southern European welfare model has historically been distinguished by some key characteristics. In these countries social cohesion was built primarily on family networks rather than wage labour (Paugam, 2016), and high rates of (often self-built) homeownership (Allen et al., 2004, p.20). This distinctive model shaped both the nature of housing precarity and homelessness prior to the 2008 financial crisis.

The economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures marked a fundamental rupture in this social protection system, turning Greece's welfare regime from one of relative security to one marked by constant precariousness and vulnerability (Spyridakis, 2018, p.10). This transformation manifested in heightened social inequalities, an increase in poverty, and restricted housing access, particularly affecting low-wage renters (Maloutas et al., 2020). Beyond these material effects, the process of precarisation also intensified social discomfort and suffering, evidenced by declining physical and mental health outcomes (Kentikelenis et al., 2011; Economou et al., 2013), increased substance use and risky injection practices (Nikolopoulos et al., 2015), and widespread professional burnout among care service workers (Rachiotis et al., 2021).

This landscape was compounded by a sharp increase in refugee flows, which peaked in 2015 and brought thousands of people, often from war-torn areas. This dual crisis created what Cabot (2019) terms a 'precarity continuum', encompassing both newly arrived refugees and Greek citizens who became 'internal refugees', estranged not from their homeland but from social connections and basic rights. Within this context, both visible and, predominately, invisible homelessness have proliferated. While reliable longitudinal data on homelessness in Athens is unavailable, some signs point to an extension and modification of the phenomenon. Since 2010, service providers report a 40% increase in the use of housing services (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017), while broader socioeconomic indicators—such as rising poverty rates, increased social exclusion, and persistent long-term unemployment—indicate an expanding population at risk of housing loss (Kourachanis, 2015, p.183). The demographic composition has also shifted, with the homeless population now including a large number of native citizens from the lower middle class, as well as families with children and newly arriving migrants. The issue has since attracted international and local media attention, resulting in a related public discourse and an increase in research.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that relevant research remains in its early stages, presenting a paradox in the conduct of qualitative and ethnographic studies without a prior comprehensive and systematic mapping of the homeless population. However, existing studies have already shed light on significant aspects of the phenomenon.

For example, Kourachanis (2016; 2018) used semi-structured biographical interviews to investigate the reasons for homelessness, initially focusing on 12 productive-age men experiencing homelessness and later on 12 single families experiencing homelessness. He identified five types of structural and relational factors that lead to homelessness: lack of income due to long-term unemployment, residual family and housing policies, absence of supportive family environment, the economic crisis preventing broader family networks from providing support to their most vulnerable members, and cultural norms involved around family aid, which are characterised by patriarchal and religious beliefs.

Two polytropic ethnographic studies offer valuable insights into the construction of homelessness within care and support spaces.

Bourlessas (2018a; b; 2020) highlights the dynamic process of shaping geographies of homelessness in crisis-stricken Athens, alongside overall poverty management and welfare restructuring. The metaphor of a 'machinic archipelago' illustrates how the interplay of place and mobility shapes the othering of individuals experiencing homelessness. Within the city's institutional and material context, specific patterns of mobility emerge, such as the forced mobility of the hosts of a night shelter— imposed to them by the administration as a form of treatment toward 'self-mobilisation'— as well as the frequent purposeful movement of street-based sleepers aiming to avoid stigmatisation. Thus, the geographies of homelessness in central Athens, Greece, are composed by an archipelago of spaces in the city, wherein the homeless stigma is hidden from the public eye, accepted, manifested, managed, reproduced, embodied, negotiated, and contested (Bourlessas, 2018a, p.11).

Complementing this, Vogkli's (2021) ethnographic work redefines homelessness as a state of 'ontological insecurity', exacerbated by the financial difficulties faced by support organisations, inadequate staffing, and employee burnout. These factors further marginalise the homeless both psychologically and materially, resulting in a growing divide between workers and the homeless and leaving care provision in limbo. Vogkli shows how adverse conditions, lack of coordination between shelter and service providers, and insufficient resources undermine the care workers' efforts to provide tailored support, leading to the misrecognition of experiences of the homeless. Her work offers a valuable stand to further explore marginality among the people experiencing homelessness in Athens.

While studies conducted in Greece have highlighted significant aspects of homelessness, critical dimensions remain underexplored or require more in-depth investigation. Firstly, the biographical and housing pathways of the general homeless population demand further study. Although existing research has identified important factors involved in the formation of homeless pathways, and depicted the homelessness landscape during the economic crisis, the processes through which individuals become homeless and how these processes lead to marginalisation and loss of agency need deeper exploration. Additionally, certain populations, such as substance users, who are prominently represented among the visibly homeless, remain largely overlooked in research. Since its emergence during the recession, and in line with societal developments, domestic research has mainly focused on the population of the 'new homeless' (see Theodorikakou et al., 2013). Thus, although the multifaceted crises have significantly exacerbated the situation for the persistent 'undeserving' poor, such as drug users (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017), the diversity of pathways leading to homelessness and the various dimensions of the phenomenon have not been fully acknowledged.

Addressing these gaps could help develop a more systematic understanding of the diverse needs of the homeless in the post-crisis Athenian context, contributing to the limited body of knowledge on homelessness in Southern Europe. In doing so, the article intends to pursue this direction, employing a distinctive pathways approach, framed within the concepts of precariousness and marginality.

A Pathways Approach to Studying Precariousness and Marginality

Pathways research and longitudinal studies have consistently identified overlapping drivers that contribute to homelessness, despite the varied and complex nature of individual trajectories (Barker, 2016). These recurring drivers include economic precarity and poverty (Fitzpatrick, 2000; McNaughton, 2008a; b), substance use and addiction (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011; McNaughton, 2008a; b; Mayock et al., 2008), institutional factors, particularly the availability and structure of support services (McNaughton, 2008a; Ravenhill, 2008; Mayock et al., 2008), and experiences of violence and trauma (McNaughton, 2008a; b; Mayock et al, 2021). These drivers consistently recur across most studies, regardless of the emphasis placed on each.

However, what often remains unexplored is the manner or the "particular social process" (Farrugia, 2010, p.71) through which these drivers influence the homeless trajectories and how they interrelate over time. Thus, the nuanced interplay between structural forces and individual agency in this context is not fully understood. As

Farrugia and Gerrard (2016, p.275) note, this gap is linked to homelessness research's ability to "develop an understanding of the social and political conditions surrounding homelessness", as well as to how structural causes are perceived, operationalised, and connected to the lives of the homeless.

In attempts to address these limitations, recent studies suggest that incorporating Bourdieu's socioanalysis (2001, p.3), through the concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Bourdieu, 1977), offers a valuable tool of both theorising and contextualising homelessness. This line of research aims to synthesise the complexity of intertwined factors (Ross-Brown and Leavey, 2021), effectively bridging the divide between external objective structures and the subjective dispositions, practices, and perceptions generated within particular conditions of existence. Often focusing on the personal, embodied experiences of the homeless (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009), it illuminates how structural conditions permeate various aspects of people's lives through the formation of habitus. It provides insights into how instability, isolation (Barker, 2016), and violence (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009) are formed and enacted both before and during homelessness. In this direction, researchers have underscored issues such as the symbolic burden of homelessness (Farrugia, 2010), the role of class origin in the formation of different forms of habitus, and thus homelessness (Hodgetts et al., 2012), and how the above shape a specific form of agency, leading to the reproduction of social inequality (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009). Specifically, Hodgetts et al. (2012) develop a typology for explaining the divergence between middle and lower class habitus among the homeless, with the former 'dropping into' and the later 'drifting along' homelessness.

Building on this direction, and advancing further, this article proposes the theoretical framing of the pathways approach with specific considerations of the discussion on precariousness and key concepts from Bourdieu's socioanalysis. Here precariousness is understood primarily as a form of social rupture and suffering (Bourdieu, 1963/1979; Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964/2020), and secondarily as disaffiliation (Castel, 2000) and the weakening of social bonds (Paugam, 2009). This perspective emphasises the need to understand homelessness not merely as an individual experience, but as phenomena deeply rooted in and shaped by broader socio-political and economic structures, and the ways through which they are "retranslated into lived realities" (Wacquant, 2014, p.284). At the same time it highlights the complex interplay between economic and material instability and social relationships, and the importance of integrating the disparate experiences that make up a biography (Bourdieu, 1986).

Precariousness as a social rupture first emerged in Bourdieu's studies on Algeria (Bourdieu, 1963/1979; Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964/2020). Bourdieu used the term to describe the consequences of replacing pre-capitalist agricultural structures with

urban-capitalist ones, that lead rural populations to an inability to reproduce, and shape their dispositions for the future and their incapacity to plan it. In this context, precarity is associated to the discordance and lag between the individuals consciousness and economic structures. To grasp the collapsing world of colonial Algeria, Bourdieu (re)introduced the concept of habitus (Wacquant, 2016). Habitus could be seen as "a multilayered and dynamic set of schemata that records, stores, and prolongs the influence of the diverse environments successively traversed during one's existence, […] subject to 'permanent revision' in practice" (Wacquant, 2016, p.68). In his later works, he revisited the concepts of social rupture and suffering within the social spaces of metropolitan France and the USA (Bourdieu et al., 1999). There, social suffering refers to the difficulty of accessing material and symbolic resources which are unevenly distributed in social space, arising from the process of neoliberalisation and the contradictions of public policies, where repression undermines state care.

The pathways are complex, whether involving the 'fall' and disillusionment of petty-bourgeois aspirations (where capital and field, strategies, and reproduction mechanisms are incompatible) or the entrapment in a perpetual state of poverty and marginalisation. The latter process would later be described by Wacquant (1993; 2008) as 'advanced marginality'. Wacquant (2008) identifies the effects of these processes on both the primary incorporation and the transformation of habitus, which can be shaped as "structurally unstable" (Wacquant, 2004, p.105) or even "broken/splintered" (Wacquant, 2016, p.69). He emphasises the need to examine the expansion of urban marginality in both its material and symbolic dimensions, within a state that is liberal for those at the top and punitive toward the ones at the lower tiers of the social hierarchy. However, these interpretations should consider the varying pathways among countries, which result from the variations in welfare regimes (Wacquant, 2009, p.175).

Similarly, Paugam (2009; 2016) refers to precarisation as a process of 'social disqualification', meaning a condition of chronic employment instability and accumulation of disadvantages. This can lead to the weakening of social bonds that offer individuals the necessary social protection as well as material, symbolic, and emotional recognition. While precarisation originates from structural economic changes, it permeates, distributes, and reproduces through social relations. In this context, Castel (2000) discusses a relational impoverishment, which he calls 'social disaffiliation'. Through the process of disaffiliation, "economic insecurity leads to destitution, and the fragility of social relations to isolation" (Castel, 2000 p.520). The aforementioned approaches of precariousness and marginality, complemented with Bourdieu's socioanalysis, could inform us on the pathways into and through homelessness, particularly in the context of Southern Europe, with a specific focus on Athens. In this study, precariousness is defined as a condition of ontological

insecurity, primarily shaped within the family environment, while marginality, is a well-established and entrenched condition, shaped secondarily through interactions with life on the streets, involvement with the criminal justice system, and engagement with social services.

Research Design

The methodological design of this research includes the integration of multiple methodological perspectives in the collection and analysis of data, with a central focus on the temporal dimension. Namely, timing and sequencing (Elder and O'Rand, 1995) were significant elements in this process. Through a combination of life trajectory approach with an emphasis on housing trajectory, biographical research, and ethnographic methods, the study facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and highlights its multifaceted aspects. The data collection methods included a biographical trajectory questionnaire, biographical narrative interviews, which served as the primary data collection tool, and ethnographic observation.

Participants

The 74 key participants in this study were either native citizens or long-term migrant residents, all falling within the ETHOS typology—subcategories 1 to 3—(FEANTSA, 2005). The decision to include only natives or long-term residents and to exclude newly arrived refugees was based on a language criterion. In the biographical narrative interview process, participants' speech is central to the quality of the data. The involvement of interpreters could risk distorting the data or hindering the establishment of a trust-based relationship between the researcher and participant.

Of the 74 participants, 55 were male, 17 were female, and two were transgender. Their ages ranged from 21 to 80 years, with an average age of 47.9. Ten participants were from countries within or outside the EU, and three were Greek Roma. In terms of living conditions, 27 participants were residing in homeless shelters or reintegration hostels as part of addiction treatment programs (22 in shelters and five in hostels). The remaining 47 participants had no form of shelter and were living 'on the street'.

In engaging with the participants, I collaborated with four different organisations. My 20-month fieldwork journey began with volunteering in a street outreach group that addresses the general homeless population. This group operates a mobile soup kitchen, making evening rounds in areas of the city with a high concentration of homelessness. My subsequent visits to various shelters and facilities allowed me to explore different aspects of the issue. The second organisation was a harm reduction centre offering day services to individuals with substance dependence,

many of whom are homeless. The third was a day centre serving the general homeless population, and the fourth was a transitional shelter operated by the Municipality of Athens. Participant recruitment was predominately initiated through my direct approach, with a smaller proportion facilitated by recommendations from the organisations' staff.

The sampling strategy was not designed to be representative of the overall homeless population in Athens but was focused on individuals experiencing visible forms of homelessness at the time of the research (either on the streets or in shelters). Instead, the sampling was theoretical (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Bruman, 2016). A quota was retained with regard to street and sheltered population, gender, and age, similar to the results of the most recent point in time official count of the homeless in Athens during 2018 (Arapoglou et al., 2021). 'Theoretical sampling' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Bryman, 2016) aimed to address the research questions, particularly to compare patterns and processes leading into and through visible homelessness, and to highlight the role of social policies and services in the lives of the homeless, without imposing preconceived categorisations. A distinction between the trajectories of drug users and non-users emerged organically during the data collection process, supported and informed by the official count of the Athenian homeless population in 2018, which revealed that 40% of the street homeless population were drug users (Arapoglou et al., 2021). This finding corroborated by my ethnographic observation and was exacerbated by the exclusion of drug users from homeless shelters during the time of the research. For this reason the participants were initially recruited from services that address the needs of the general homeless population (such as the street outreach group and the day centre) and later on from ones that address the needs of drug users.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent, ensuring the protection of their personal data and safeguarding their anonymity. They took place in various mutually agreed-upon locations, including public spaces and homelessness service facilities. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 27 of the respondents. My voluntary work and enduring presence in the field assisted to establish relationships of trust with all the respondents. A discrete handling of sensitive issues and empathy allowed the disclosure of traumatic events and indeed an emotional relief and restorative encounter of the past was acknowledged in the interviews by many respondents.

Analysis

The research analysis followed a three-tiered approach, focusing on different levels of the phenomenon (macro, meso, and micro). These levels can be viewed as vantage points within the broader landscape of homelessness in Athens. At each stage, the analytical perspective shifts, beginning with a macro-level, external

perspective (quantitative analysis), moving to a meso-level focus on typologies of homelessness pathways, and ultimately progressing to a micro-level understanding, capturing how individuals experience and interpret homelessness (biographical analysis, ethnographic data). This final phase includes detailed case studies that illustrate the typical pathways identified at the meso-level, though these will not be elaborated upon here for brevity. In essence, the analytical process involves a shift in perspective, which, following Bourdieu, is akin to moving "from the space of positions" to "the space of points of view" (Bourdieu, 2000, pp.183-184).

Specifically, the focus on the life trajectory initially employed quantitative and then mixed methods analysis to identify patterns. The quantitative data provided an overview of significant variations of aggravating factors and guided further examination of the pathways. At the same time, they offered crucial insights into the partially documented profiles of the homeless in the local count (see Arapoglou et al., 2021). The biographical interview focused on the perspectives, perceptions, and practices of the homeless themselves. It also revealed how the accumulation of multiple aggravating factors—as a process of loss(es) and suffering—led to the initial incident of visible homelessness and how this process was metabolised and in turn influenced the (re)shaping of their dispositions through the interweaving of personal trajectories with the existing institutional framework. These aspects were enriched by the ethnographic method, which acted as a source of feedback on the data obtained from biographical interviews. It provided rich material regarding the geography of homelessness in Athens, highlighting the relationship of the participants with the corresponding support services and simultaneously contributing to the enrichment of limited existing knowledge about the very field of the street, a unique social space where, in part, homelessness is constituted (Bourlessas, 2018a). In this way, pathways of rupture and suffering were formed, along with the potential for theoretical and methodological enrichment of the pathways approach, primarily in the domestic but also in the international literature.

Findings

First level of analysis

The first level of analysis, conducted using quantitative methods with SPSS, revealed a pivotal distinction among the participants, dividing them into two major groups: those who followed a trajectory involving substance use and those who did not engage in the use of psychoactive substances. Significant differences were observed between these groups in terms of their life trajectories and the critical transitions both before and after their first visible homelessness incident.

Table 1. Overall trajectory of substance users and non-users

	Users	Non-users
N	41	33
Demographic characteristics		
Age (years)*[1]	40,1	57,7
Profile and family history		
Working and lower-middle class background	87,2%	76,7%
Adverse childhood experiences/family violence*	82,5%	36,4%
Edgework during adolescence*[2]	67,5%	0%
Low educational level	50,0%	30,3%
Penal system involvement*	58,5%	9,1%
Work trajectory		
Never worked before	12,5%	3,1%
Housing trajectory		
Never participated in household maintenance	26,8%	12,1%
Mean duration of single household maintenance (months)*	34,5	135,7
Mean duration of multi-person household maintenance (months)*	44,2	145,2
Housing/Accommodation trajectory through homelessness		
Age of first visible incident (years)*	29,5	50,8
Episodically homeless	73,2%	21,2%
Mean number of incidents	2,67	1,37
Mean duration of current incident (months)*	14,2	51,4
ETHOS subcategory 1-current incident (%)[3]	82,9%	39,4%
ETHOS subcategories 2 and 3-current incident (%)	17,1%	60,6%
Lifetime duration of stay in ETHOS subcategories 1-3 (months)*	34,4	54,5
Lifetime duration of stay in ETHOS subcategories 1-13 (months)	54,1	73,6
Experience and practices		
Access to state allowance	18,4%	31,1%
Income gaining practices	57,9%	43,7%
Experienced violent attack while homeless	83,8%	53,3%

Specifically, quantitative analysis revealed that substance users generally experience visible forms of homelessness (either on the streets or in shelters) earlier in life, but tend to remain in this condition for a shorter overall duration. The nature of their homelessness is largely episodic, with multiple episodes lasting approximately one year each. This group is younger, has lower educational attainment compared to non-users, and has encountered significantly more adverse or traumatic experiences during childhood. Many began using substances and/or engaging in edgework as teenagers, with the majority having spent time in incarceration. Some participants in this group had never been employed, while those who had worked

1 * $p < 0.05$, indicating statistical significance

2 The term *edgework* was introduced to homelessness pathways research by McNaughton (2008a) and refers to engaging in risk-taking practices. Here, it encompasses practices such as drug use and involvement in delinquent activities, which may have hindered the acquisition of resources that support future social integration.

3 (FEANTSA, 2005)

were primarily engaged in low-level service sector jobs. Their contributions to household maintenance over their lifetimes were notably briefer than those of the non-using group. While homeless, they more frequently lived in outdoor spaces rather than shelters, likely due to their exclusion from shelters up until the time of the research. Lastly, this group reported experiencing significantly higher rates of violence during their homelessness.

By contrast, participants who were not involved in substance use were generally older and encountered visible forms of homelessness at a later stage in life. Their educational levels were slightly higher than those in the substance-using group. Many were born in rural areas or in Balkan countries, and they reported fewer adverse childhood experiences compared to substance users, with little to no interaction with the penal system. All participants in this group had worked at least once in their lives, often as small business owners, unskilled labourers, or in undeclared employment. Regarding their housing trajectories, they had contributed to maintaining a single or multi-person household for extended periods. These individuals typically experienced a single episode of visible homelessness, which began later in life and from which they were unable to recover. The majority resided in transitional shelters.

This first level of analysis laid the foundation for further exploration of the different forms these pathways can take, ultimately evolving into trajectories of marginalisation.

Second level of analysis

The second level of analysis resulted in the identification of nine distinct pathways. Based on the core distinction established in the first level, the first four pathways (1-4) were followed by participants involved in substance use, while the remaining five pathways (5-9) were followed by those who were not:

1. The *"early marginalisation"* pathway, where the first incident of (usually visible) homelessness is experienced during adolescence or early adulthood. This typically occurs as an early escape to the streets or as a consequence of the onset of heavy substance use.

2. The *"penal system involvement*" pathway, where participants experience their first homelessness episode as adults, with at least one incident of incarceration preceding this event.

3. The *"late marginalisation"* pathway, where participants become homeless at an older age without any prior penal system involvement.

4. The "*dual dependency"* pathway, where the experiences of female substance users are shaped by both substance dependence and gender inequalities in a patriarchal society, manifesting in distinct ways while living on the streets.

5. The *"work precariousness and downfall"* pathway, where the collective structural condition of the economic crisis led participants to unemployment or financial ruin.

6. The *"health precariousness and collapse"* pathway, where the first visible incident followed the onset of a serious physical or mental health problem that prevented participants from working.

7. The *"invisible female poverty"* pathway, where participants, often due to gender-defined roles, were not employed for extended periods and contributed through unpaid domestic labour to household maintenance.

8. The *"invisible poverty without family support"* pathway, in which homelessness emerged through a process that started with problems in their family of origin, combined with a lack of employment opportunities that worsened during the economic recession.

9. The *"invisible poverty of the undocumented"* pathway, where homelessness was a direct result of structural exclusion from work and housing due to the absence of legal documents, a situation that worsened during the crisis.

Table 2. Substantial chronological transitions for the nine pathways

	Mean of onset of substance abuse/main substance (years)	**Mean of first visible homeless-ness incident** (years)	**Mean of first incarcera-tion** (years)	**Mean age** (years)
1. Early marginalisation N=14	16,0	16,7	21,1	34,2
2. Penal system involvement N=9	25,3	38,4	27,2	45,2
3. Late marginalisation N=6	24,1	41,3	----	46,5
4. Dual dependency N=12	21,8	32,0	----	39,5
5. Work precariousness and downfall N=13	----	60,6	----	65,6
6. Health precariousness and collapse N=8	----	52,6	-----	57,2
7. Invisible female poverty N=3	----	58,0	-----	62,6
8. Invisible poverty without family support N=6	-----	37,3	-----	43,8
9. Invisible poverty of the undocumented N=3	-----	39,0 Greece 26,5 other countries	-----	47,0

Two processes toward marginalisation

The three-level analysis revealed two distinct processes of marginalisation: "drifting along" and "dropping into" (Hodgetts et al., 2012, p.1).[4]

The first process, **followed by substance users**, typically begins in early life. Their pathways reflect prolonged material deprivation among the working and lower-middle classes, coupled with deficits in cultural, social, and emotional capital—typically transmitted through family relations. In a welfare regime where the family is the primary provider of class position reproduction and informal protection (Papadopoulos and Roumbakis, 2013), these deficits are pivotal.

Within this context, private violence emerged as a crucial aggravating factor that shapes participants' dispositions at a primary level. This finding underscores the connection between childhood experiences, particularly poverty and domestic violence, and homelessness, as highlighted in previous international research (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Ravenhill, 2008; Mayock et al., 2021). This violence is then transferred, through the mediation of social and penal policy, into the field of the street. In this particular field, "the present becomes so uncertain that it devours the future" (Wacquant, 1999, p.156). It represents a social space of disorganisation, where survival depends on the constant readiness to exploit any available material or symbolic resource while also protecting oneself from others. Practices of earning small incomes, combined with a broader shift in penal policy that targets specific populations (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2010; EKTEPN, 2019; 2020), often resulted in deeper entanglement with the penal system for offences that might otherwise have been redeemable. The challenges faced by women in this environment were excessive. To survive in an environment hostile to the female body, they mobilised a specific form of capital available to them, 'vicarious social capital' (Watson, 2016), through the formation of intimate relationships, which simultaneously served as sources of protection and violence.

The analysis suggests that substance experimentation and addiction are reactions to the material, emotional, and social deprivation experienced by the participants in their youth. However, this reaction was mediated and consolidated by the instillation of a primary habitus of precariousness (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This primary habitus gradually transformed into a secondary habitus of marginality, shaped by early education abandonment and exposure to street and prison violence, entailing the accumulation of forms of capital that are only redeemable in this particular social space, often resulting in repeated incarcerations. Simultaneously, this social space became an arena where the primary habitus of precariousness could be converted into social status and economic benefits

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4 Building on Hodgett's et al. (2012) typology, these terms are reinterpreted here, to fit the empirical data and context dynamics of this research.

(Sandberg, 2008, p.157). Thus, through the mediation of initially residual and subsequently punitive social institutions, the participants were progressively led from poverty to marginalisation.

For the participants in the substance use pathways, the impact of the crisis was indirect yet potent, manifesting through the underfunding of support services, the expansion and intensification of violence in the street environment, the introduction of new, economically affordable but highly harmful drugs, and the inability of family networks to provide support (where they existed).

Contrary to those who followed the substance use pathways, who gradually 'drift along' marginalisation through a prolonged process, **participants in the non-use pathways—**except those on the 'invisible poverty of the undocumented' pathway—'drop into' it. This occurs through a process of total disintegration of their living conditions, creating tension between objective opportunities and previously formed dispositions (Bourdieu, 2000).

These individuals are older and, despite also coming from impoverished backgrounds, were previously able to effectively mobilise the necessary resources for social participation and integration into mainstream culture. They possessed a primary habitus, either of the traditional lower-middle or working class, where values of hard work, solidarity, and honesty fuelled aspirations for a better life. These values were either nostalgically recalled or used to reject the stigma of homelessness in their narratives. At the same time, their interpersonal and familial relationships maintained a patriarchal structure, fostering different aspirations, practices, and ultimately distinct pathways among men and women experiencing homelessness.

The crisis marked a turning point, disrupting the lower-middle-class habitus and instilling a habitus of precariousness. Through their interaction with the residual state institutions, symbolic violence, and occasional exposure to the street environment, this habitus rapidly transformed into one of marginality, leading to a discrepant integration into the dominant culture, isolation, and entrapment. These people find themselves in a liminal position: distanced from the life of the housed, yet "out of place" from the street environment (Hodgetts et. al, 2012, p.6). Once homeless, they entered a state of resignation and stagnation within this harrowing new condition, lacking the necessary resources to cope. Their stigmatised position resulted in entrapment in a hopeless social order, accompanied by ruptures and upheavals in established social relations, leading to a diminution of familial and social capital since work exclusion had already been preceded.

For them, the impacts of the crisis were more distinct, manifesting in increased unemployment, reduced opportunities for both formal and informal employment, and a recessionary climate in the labour market. This was compounded by the strain on

their physical and mental health due to economic pressures, which coincided with the withdrawal of already insufficient policies for people with mental health difficulties and the reduction in disability benefits. Furthermore, economic hardship directly affected the romantic relationships of some participants, undermined the capacity of family networks to provide support, and intensified existing family dysfunctions. As a result, participants lost forms of capital during the crisis—capital that had previously offered crucial social protection and recognition (Paugam, 2016; Bourdieu, 1986). As renters or dependents from the working or lower-middle class, they were among the first to be impacted (Maloutas et al., 2020).

The aforementioned are interconnected with the retreat of already inadequate state intervention within the expanding precariousness of the 'familistic welfare model' (see Papadopoulos and Roumbakis, 2013). This model has shaped a pluralistic **network of services** aimed at addressing only the emergency needs of those facing multiple challenges (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017). However, as revealed by the research data, even these urgent needs are only partially met. The synthesis of analytical approaches shows that interaction with support services leads to the reproduction of the subordinate position of the homeless, ultimately deepening their marginalisation. This occurs through a combination of spatial, institutional, and relational factors that transform individuals from 'housed' to 'homeless'. Thus, through a process in which the "appropriation of one's time and objectives" (Gounis, 1992, p.689) plays a central role, they find themselves trapped in a "specific type of institutionalisation", referred to as "shelterisation" (Arapoglou et al., 2015, p.11; Dear and Wolch, 2014).

However, shelterisation implies different practices for those living on the streets and those residing in shelters. For the former, it involves the need for constant mobility between various services within the urban landscape to meet their urgent needs (food, personal hygiene, medical, and legal coverage). For the latter, it is constituted by the operational framework of shelters, which, through a set of restrictions and controls, remove the possibility of self-determination for the residents. In both cases, contact with these services traps the homeless in a state of "abeyance" (Hopper and Baumohl, 1994, p.528). In this landscape, the operation of closed community drug addiction treatment facilities and the extremely limited "Housing-First" type programmes provide alternative care sites.

From this analysis, it becomes evident that the pathways into homelessness also shape the **experiences** within it through the (re)formation and functions of habitus and corresponding practices. Similarly, the pathways leading to homelessness affect how the homeless interpret both their previous experiences and the experience of homelessness itself. For those marginalised early in life, their suffering is perceived as an inherent part of their existence, with little acknowledgement of the

transformations that led to it. In contrast, for individuals who previously charted an independent trajectory—such as those on the "work precariousness and downfall" and "health precariousness and collapse" pathways—or who were closer to the mainstream culture, the experience of downfall and exclusion conflicts with the previously formed habitus. They may attribute their marginalisation to broader societal transformations or even decisions made at the higher strata of social hierarchy. However, their new subordinate position does not allow for a turn toward political or other claims.

In these circumstances, the only available possibility for negotiating agency is limited to either accepting or rejecting their new stigmatised position. Aware of societal perceptions of homelessness, participants often projected versions of a non-homeless identity, mainly through distinguishing themselves from the characteristics and practices attributed to the homeless by dominant discourses (see Snow and Anderson, 1987). This division was sometimes spatially expressed through the choice of isolated sleeping locations or the avoidance of communal spaces in shelters. In any case, these versions are shaped in relation to the distinct paths they followed into homelessness.

Yet, the research reveals that at the heart of personal histories, **trauma and suffering** have long accumulated behind stigmatising categorisations, particularly for those from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds living in precarious conditions for years. The study sheds light on a continuous and porous universe of violence that shifts between the private and public spheres, alternating between symbolic and physical forms. The violence mediates the instillation of a habitus of marginality, whether primary or secondary.

Simultaneously, many homeless narratives suggest a process of incorporating dominant values, where the body becomes both a shell for inscribing stigma and a means of self-replicating violence, while also serving as the ultimate boundary of protection. Various forms of violence often remain unseen—just as poverty does—either because individuals attempt to protect themselves from further stigmatisation or because care providers recognise only its most pronounced manifestations. The violence reflected in the stories of the homeless in this research points to misrecognition of varying intensity. It is manifested through class and gender practices in both family life (labour and care division, marital strategies, neglect, abuse) and public life (in schools, streets, shelters, and prisons). Its repetitiveness forms multiple layers of suffering, accumulating both in the psyche and within the body.

Conclusions

The study employs a distinctive pathways method identifying nine distinct patterns into and through visible homelessness. While aligning with profiles documented in prior international research, this investigation goes further by detailing the specific sequence of events and critical transitions along each pathway. Crucially, it examines how a combination of key drivers interplay to shape these pathways.

These key drivers interplay with broader transformations in the Southern European welfare regime, which, through the economic crisis, have contributed to transforming a habitus of precariousness into a habitus of marginality. Specifically, the study highlights the central role of prolonged violence and suffering, alongside the unique interactions among poverty, substance use, patriarchal gender relations, and the prevalence of punitive policies and inadequate support services. These drivers translated into interconnected experiences that shaped the participants' dispositions, functioning as "matrices of perceptions, thoughts, and actions" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.33). Thus, the designation of these critical areas could serve as fields for support and intervention at a policy level.

Moreover, the pathways revealed two overarching processes of marginalisation: substance users 'drift along' marginalisation, while non-users 'drop into' it. The two processes reflect procedures of "fall" and poverty reproduction (Paugam, 2009, p.4) which follow the features of the familistic model and are distributed through social relations. They also underscore that dispositions shaped over time imply different perspectives on the experience of homelessness and, consequently, different pathways toward rehousing.

The concept of habitus proved to be a valuable tool in capturing this complex relationship between macro-social transformations and micro-social interactions that shape individual pathways. By penetrating the structural level, it allows multiple perspectives, offering a deep exploration of the individual level over time, which leads to distinct forms of agency. This approach shows that factors often cited as individual factors in homelessness research, such as drug use, are in fact products of a set of structural and institutional conditions.

The data reveal that the condition of visible homelessness serves as a threshold—a conceptual boundary beyond which stable rehousing becomes increasingly challenging. This state does not emerge from individuals' adaptation to a homeless way of life; rather, it is shaped by a constellation of structural, institutional, and relational factors, including the network of support services, which ultimately contribute to entrapment and further disempowerment.

Therefore, this article offers proposals for further developing the theoretical and methodological foundations of the pathways approach, within the Greek and international contexts, through a systematic dialogue with Bourdieu's socioanalysis. Moreover, it illuminates social processes and aspects of the phenomenon that have remained unexplored in the domestic literature, such as the variety of pathways and transitions into and through the street and the multitudinous yet underexplored population of street homeless drug users.

Finally, the research demonstrates that homelessness is a process of precarisation, social rupture, and marginalisation, primarily affecting the most deprived members of the working class and, secondarily, the traditional lower-middle class. This process is mediated by violence and suffering. For some, it threatens their very biological survival, while for others, it results in "social death" (Bourdieu, 1999, p.372). However, for all, it involves significant devaluation and humiliation. Within this framework, the pursuit of temporary 'solutions' that ignore the profound processes of suffering and social disconnection—through which individuals find themselves homeless—can only serve to "suspend the most extreme effects of poverty and sustain, without hope, the lives of the most vulnerable, masking the extent of precariousness that now affects an expanding segment of the population" (Arapoglou et al., 2015, p.12).

The study acknowledges certain limitations. Typologies, such as the one presented in this article, are valuable tools for identifying different pathways into and through homelessness, offering a basis for targeted policy interventions. However, they also function as idealised frameworks that may limit the uniqueness of individual experiences of homelessness. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on visible homelessness, leaving room for future research to explore the trajectories of individuals experiencing hidden forms of homelessness. Gendered roles and practices, evident in the forms of capital and the formation of habitus, briefly mentioned in the main text, are worthy of further analysis and detailed exposition, through the lens of intersectionality, since they are not confined to the trajectories of 'dual dependency' and 'invisible female poverty', but permeate the relationship of all the people experiencing homelessness interviewed. Furthermore, issues related to ethnicity and migration status are not comprehensively addressed here, highlighting the need for further investigation on how migration identities shape the experience of homelessness within the Athenian context.

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"Combined with homelessness, it's just a nightmare": A Qualitative Study Exploring How People Experiencing Homelessness Perceive Mental Health and Mental Health Services

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Abstract_ *People experiencing chronic homelessness (PECH) have relatively poor mental health. Whilst trauma and psychologically informed services are becoming more commonplace and demonstrate positive outcomes, they are still underutilised by PECH. Furthermore, little is known about how PECH understand their own mental health. This qualitative study explores PECH's perceptions of mental health, mental health services, and any perceived barriers or facilitators to access. Eleven PECH participated in semi-structured interviews. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to make sense of the transcripts, and five overarching group experiential themes were created: 'Origins of Mental Health', 'Understanding of Mental Health Difficulties', 'Experiences of Help-Seeking and Services', 'Self-help and Self-preservation', and 'Perspectives on Mental Health Needs'. Participants understood their mental health in terms of life experiences and expressed a need for interpersonal connection over traditional psychological or psychiatric model-specific interventions, suggesting that attachment-informed support may be beneficial. Whilst policies begin to acknowledge the importance of outreach services and flexible person-centred support, as yet this does not go far enough; participants perceptions of services were based on, often negative, past experiences, with many feeling that the damage was already done. Services need to be proactive in identifying people who need support, taking a non-judgemental stance, and working to rebuild trust.*

Key words_ *mental health; homelessness; service provision; mental health support; intervention*

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Introduction

Heightened rates of poor mental health in people experiencing homelessness (PEH) are well documented and prevalence of mental health diagnoses are higher than in the general population (Barry et al., 2024). In a recent study by Hertzberg and Boobis (2022), 82% of PEH reported having a diagnosed mental health issue, compared to 12% of the general population, and a dual-diagnosis was reported by 25%. The Government report, 'Health Matters, Rough Sleeping' (Public Health England, 2020) acknowledges that common mental health conditions are twice as high for PEH, with psychosis 15 times as prevalent. These heightened rates suggest a level of complexity that public health and local policies need to take into account (Gutwinski et al, 2021) in order to provide adequate levels of mental health support. However, research biases from single-point data captures may skew diagnostic rates, as people who enter-and-exit homelessness briefly and as a one-time event may not have the same mental health complexities as those who have long-term experiences of homelessness (O'Sullivan et al., 2020). Instead, a bi-directional understanding of the link between mental health and homelessness may be helpful (Ridley et al., 2020), acknowledging individual difficulties, the impact of homelessness itself, and the impact of health and social inequalities over the life span.

The mortality rate in PEH is higher (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2022) and continues to grow each year, with health inequalities widening (Jackson et al., 2024); 44.6% of deaths were related to problematic substance use, whilst 13.5% were due to suicide. Lui and Hwang (2021) discussed the need to understand high mortality rates, not just in terms of the health and environmental challenges that PEH experience, but in the context of the structural barriers and social burdens they face. Despite poorer health outcomes for those who have long-term histories of homelessness, PEH are frequent attendees at Accident & Emergency departments for both physical and mental health crises (British Red Cross, 2021) and it may be that opportunities to offer support are being missed. Omerov et al.'s (2020) systematic review of PEH's experiences of health and social care services reports how PEH experienced difficulties in service access and discrimination, as well as having to prioritise their basic needs; although none of the included literature focused on mental health services, the results may be transferable, but the issue remains that little is known about how PEH experience statutory mental health services and why they may not be being utilised before crisis point.

Causes of homelessness

Despite government policies aimed to reduce homelessness, e.g., the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (UK Public General Acts, 2017), homelessness is still on the rise within the United Kingdom, both for street-based sleepers and those in temporary accommodation (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities [DLCH],

2024a; DLCH, 2024b), although these figures may not show the true extent as they miss 'hidden' homelessness, e.g., sofa-surfing. People can initially become homeless for numerous personal reasons, including relationship breakdowns, unemployment and redundancy, and mental health difficulties (Piat et al., 2015), alongside the impact of the recent cost of living crisis (Allard, 2022) and the needs of people who experience homelessness briefly, may be different from those who remain homeless (O'Sullivan et al., 2020). Despite this, Fountain and Howes (2019) report that two thirds of their participants named problematic substance use as the primary catalyst for becoming homeless. Their report considers the complex relationship between homelessness and substance use; becoming homeless may be a direct trigger for substance use, and rates of substance use increase the longer someone remains homeless, both as an individual survival mechanism and through the social influence of peer relationships. Substance use has also been linked to offending behaviours which can result in custodial sentences (Butler et al., 2024), perpetuating cycles of homelessness. Such adversity leads to a sense of marginalisation, stigma, and separation (Sibthorp-Protts et al., 2023), impacting negatively on mental health.

Media messages that homelessness can happen to anyone are not entirely true, with childhood poverty and experiences such as early drug use, trauma, and time in care, increasing the likelihood (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018), as well as overrepresentation of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities (ONS, 2023). A recent report in Wales, UK, showed that PEH were more likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences (Grey and Woodfine, 2019), with 50% of PEH reporting four or more, which is consistent with international figures (Lui et al., 2021). The impact of a difficult early life is more likely to lead to complex homelessness and social exclusion (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013), as well as an increased risk of victimisation or criminal justice involvement (Edalti et al., 2017), problematic substance use, mental health difficulties, and self-directed and interpersonal violence (Hughes et al., 2017). The needs of people who briefly become homeless may be different from those who remain homeless (Johnson and Chamberlain, 2011) and multiple stressful life events, along with problematic substance use and health-related issues, leave people more vulnerable to multiple episodes of homelessness (Roca et al., 2019). Nine in 10 PEH have experienced violence, abuse, or theft on the streets (Sutton-Hamilton and Sanders, 2023), and therefore the duration of homelessness both increases risk and feeds into a pattern of traumatisation across the lifespan.

Mental health and homelessness

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [NICE] has produced guidelines to support the access of health and social care services for PEH (NICE, 2022), but the evidence-base is predominantly randomised control trials and studies based in the United States (NICE, 2022), which has different healthcare systems to the UK. A participatory action research study by Rogers and Evans (2023) questioned what practical recommendations could be given to counsellors working with PEH; although also based in the USA, they highlighted the importance of trauma-informed services, relational connection, collaborative working, and understanding both the trauma and sense of agency for PEH. Although the benefit of designing psychologically and trauma-informed services for PEH has been well documented in the UK (Williamson and Taylor, 2015; Phipps et al., 2017), they focus on hostels, rather than statutory services. Conolly (2018) shows the importance of adapted mental health services and there is a growing literature on the benefits of psychological therapies for PEH (e.g., Hyun et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021) but aspects of homelessness, such as lack of sleep (Huynh et al., 2024), may impact the benefit of structured approaches. A recent systematic review highlights the potential benefits of cognitive-behavioural therapy and motivational interviewing interventions (Bodley-Scott et al., 2024), but the domination of medical diagnoses of 'mental illness' narrows the scope of research to targeted interventions designed to reduce symptom levels. Alternative models, such as The Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone et al, 2018), that focus on formulating problems in a social and developmental context remain under-researched, yet may have much to offer to those who have been disadvantaged from childhood.

Many PEH have engaged with mental health services prior to experiencing homelessness (Drife, 2025), but this traditional support does not appear to be a preventative measure. The importance of our early attachment relationships is well established (e.g., Bowlby, 1969), and childhood abuse increases the likelihood of difficulties in relationships later in life (Unger and De Luca, 2014). In a recent systematic review, the majority of PEH had insecure types of attachment (Neves-Horácio et al., 2023), which is often expressed by being mistrustful or fearful of close relationships. Western homeless populations have higher rates of childhood sexual and physical abuse (Sundin and Baguley, 2015), although there are gender and age differences; these abuses inevitably represent a violation of trust in carers and increase the potential for developing PTSD symptoms (Taylor et al., 2022). As a consequence, PEH are likely to have difficulty building the secure relationships they need to support them. This double jeopardy, stemming from early insecure attachment, may impact therapeutic relationships (Bucci et al., 2016; Talia et al., 2019) and the levels of emotional safety PEH seek from those involved in their care

(Sochos, 2023). This inherent difficulty with seeking appropriate help (Rea, 2022), along with the stigma of homelessness, perceived or actual, may subsequently play into health inequalities (Reilly et al., 2022).

PEH's perceptions of healthcare have been explored qualitatively (e.g., Mc Conalogue et al., 2021), but such studies often address general health or focus purely on physical health. In a paper on complex recovery, individuals spoke more about addiction and physical health difficulties than they did about their experience of mental illness (Padget et al., 2016). Similarly, in a narrative study by Williams and Stickley (2011) looking at how homelessness impacted identity and mental health, only two people directly referred to their mental health, with narratives being constructed around drug use, family breakdowns, and stigma. Although Adams et al. (2022) looked at the barriers to accessing mental health support during COVID-19, participants were those who wanted to seek support and the voices of those who may not be accessing services, even when they are designed to meet their needs, are missing from the literature.

Methodology

Despite the heightened rates of mental health difficulties in PEH, often diagnosed by professionals, the important question of 'how do PEH perceive their own mental health?' remains unanswered, as existing research is often diagnostically focused. There is a lack of understanding in the existing literature of how PEH's own perceptions and experiences of mental health may influence the way they engage with services. Therefore, this research paper aims to explore PEH's perceptions of mental health and mental health services and the perceived barriers and facilitators for access to mental health services.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Plymouth 'Faculty of Health Research Ethics and Integrity Committee'. A convenience sampling approach was used in a third-sector organisation that runs a day centre for PEH in Plymouth, UK. Although information sheets were shared within the service, most participants were recruited through word-of-mouth. The researcher spent time in the service building rapport, and staff at the day centre acted as gatekeepers. Participants were read the research information sheet, and a copy was also given, time was provided to answer any questions, and easy-read consent forms were used to overcome any illiteracy barriers. Any participants who were undergoing extreme emotional distress at the time of interview, or under the influence of substances which compromised their capacity to consent, were excluded from the study. Time was provided at the end of the interview for a debrief and to ensure the

welfare of participants; the researcher is trained in stabilisation techniques and was able to offer additional support if needed, as were staff at the day-centre. Participants were given a £10 supermarket voucher after interviews were completed.

Methodology

A universal definition of homelessness has been historically elusive, making it difficult to develop transnational policy and comparative statistics (FEANTSA, 2006). FEANTSA therefore developed the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) to define homelessness and housing exclusion. In line with this, the research presented here defines PEH via the ETHOS classifications as those who are 'roofless' or 'houseless'. Additionally, the different pathways through homelessness should be acknowledged. Although McAllister et al. (2011) created a 10-group typology, Kuhn and Culhane's (1998) classification remains in wider use. They categorised PEH into three groups: transitional, episodic, and chronic. Transitional homelessness makes up the majority of PEH and is categorised by people who use a homeless service once and for a short time only, until they are stably housed again. This paper focuses on episodic and chronic homelessness, since people falling into these categories have worse health outcomes and higher rates of problematic substance use (Patterson et al., 2012; Richards et al., 2023). It is, therefore, of particular concern that their needs may not be met by current health services.

Participants were included if they were aged 21+ and fell into the ETHOS categories of 'houseless' or 'roofless'. The focus was on participants who are episodically or long-term homeless, which for the purpose of this research was defined as someone who had been homeless more than once, or for at least a year. As this research explored how PEH understand 'mental health' in general, there was no criteria around having a diagnosis or self-reported mental health difficulties; participants could speak about mental health in terms of resilience and positive mental health, as well as difficulties, if that was their understanding. Participants could be of any gender or ethnicity and basic demographic information was collected.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which were held face-to-face at the day centre. Research design and interview questions (Table 1) were developed with guidance from service-users of the centre and staff in homeless services. Participants were made aware that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to and could provide as little or as much information as they felt comfortable giving, and that this would not impact their support at the day-centre. Interviews were audio recorded and later manually transcribed. Data was stored in line with the Data Protection Act (UK Public General Acts, 2018) on a password secure laptop.

Table 1. Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Question	Prompts
What does mental health mean to you?	How would you define it? Could you tell me more?
Could you please tell me about your understanding of your own mental health?	Tell me about your thoughts around your mental health? Family history understandings of mental health? How do you perceive mental health in others? How did you first come to understand your mental health?
Could you tell me your thoughts around mental health services?	Tell me about your understanding of accessing mental health services? Can you give an example of a time you have thought about accessing mental health services? What was your understanding when you chose to, or not, access mental health support? What is your understanding of a psychologist/mental health worker? What would you suggest to someone who you felt was experiencing mental health difficulties?
Is there anything that might make it easier to access mental health services?	Could you tell me about any examples of this? It could be something that's happened to you or someone else that you know who is homeless. How might you design a service?
Is there anything that might make it difficult to access mental health services?	Could you tell me about any examples of this? It could be something that's happened to you or someone else that you know who is homeless.
Could you tell me about how you feel people in mental health services perceive homeless people?	Can you give an example of this? How does this impact your thoughts about mental health services?
Is there anything else you would like to add?	

Interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is recommended when exploring people's experiences and how they make sense of their personal and social world (Smith et al., 2022), whilst taking an inductive critical realist approach to faithfully represent participant voices. IPA gives prominence to the participant perspective and allows a holistic view of lived experience, but invites interpretation at a meaningful, rather than surface, level of the data, looking for underlying motivations and contexts to the individual experience.

Smith et al.'s (2022) seven stages of IPA analysis were followed. The researcher familiarised themself with each interview, before making initial notes at a surface and interpretive level, which then developed into personal experiential themes (PETS) for the participant. Once each interview had been analysed, the 109 PETS were combined and the five group experiential themes (GETS) accounting for shared or divergent experiences emerged through the interpretative process. Themes were cross-checked with an experienced researcher and an 'IPA Consultative Peer Group'. Additionally, member validation was completed for both PETS and GETS with one participant.

Researcher position

IPA encourages researcher reflexivity in a double hermeneutic cycle; therefore the researcher position was considered throughout. The researcher has experience of working in homeless services and felt frustrated when service-users struggled to access mental health support due to services not meeting their needs, alongside the emotional impact of the death of a service-user that had felt avoidable. This was important to acknowledge to maintain a level of objectivity whilst recognising the subjective nature of the analysis. A presuppositional interview (Barret-Rodger et al., 2022) was completed prior to data collection, bracketing interviews were used, and a reflective journal was kept, mitigating bias.

Findings

Participants

Smith et al. (2022) recommend 10 participants for an IPA study, and 11 interviews were completed (Table 1); the average interview length was 28 minutes.

Table 2. Table of participants 1

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Homelessness history	Substance Use
James	M	37	White British	6 months, 2nd time	Occasional alcohol/cannabis
Liam	M	46	White British	2/3 years; long history of homelessness	Poly-drug use
Ben	M	31	White British	2½ years; long history of homelessness	Poly-drug use
Sofia	F	21	White British	2½ years	Poly-drug use
Chris	M	52	White British	7 months; 2nd time	None reported
Oliver	M	49	British-Indian	One year	Occasional alcohol
Rosie	F	37	White British	4 months; long history of homelessness	Poly-drug use
John	M	50	White British	Eight months; 2nd time	None reported
Amelia	F	23	White British	One year	Poly-drug use
Lucas	M	37	White British	2½ years; 10 years of homelessness	Poly-drug use
Isabella	F	36	White British	7 weeks; 8-9 episodes of homelessness	Poly-drug use

In total seven men and four women were interviewed, and ages ranged from 21 to 52 (mean age: 38) and all, but one, participants described themselves as White-British. Length of homelessness and substance use were self-reported. Although no other demographic data was specifically collected, four of the participants shared that they were care leavers and five disclosed that they have previous experience with the criminal justice system. Whilst it was not an inclusion criterion, all

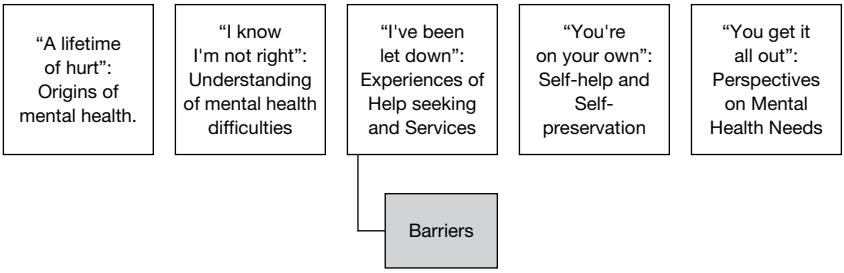
1 Pseudonyms used

participants alluded to having mental health difficulties, even if not formally diagnosed and described how being homeless exacerbated this, particularly for those participants who had been homeless for longer periods of time.

Themes

Following the analysis, five GETS, and one subtheme emerged (see Figure 1) and will be described in detail.

Figure 1. Overview of themes



"A lifetime of hurt": Origins of mental health

An important feature of how participants understood their own mental health was the sense that it was impacted by lifetime events. For many, mental health difficulties were the result of hardships from across their lifespan. Lucas said:

> I've got a lifetime of…hurt and abuse, I guess, stress and bullshit and… some of the stories I could tell you and that.

For many participants, their mental health difficulties started in childhood. John described how he started developing his own coping methods from a young age due to his early experiences:

> I was physically abused by my father. I was used as a punch bag. Then my mum…an alcoholic, every time I had a problem, she would hit the bottle. So I didn't have either parent. And I've just been left to my own devices. So I've done what I know how to survive.

However, the impact of this was that John ended up in the care system:

> And… at age 11, I was put in foster care. I left to my own devices, hence I went stealing and the car crime, everything just spiralled out of control.

John was not the only participant who was placed in care at a young age and Lucas talked about how "that fucked my head right up […] you just feel sorta worthless" after his grandmother placed him in care after his grandad died. Although no participant talked in depth about their experience of care, there was a sense that it continued to impact their low self-esteem and self-identity. Lucas said:

> ADHD was thought to be just a naughty kid, you know […] I was bit of a problem child… even in the care system I was passed from one family to the next […] I suppose I was a naughty kid, to be fair.

Although Lucas recognised that his ADHD diagnosis was not understood, he still described himself as naughty, suggesting that the early narrative has stuck with him into adulthood and shaped his view of his early life.

Rosie spoke about mental health across generations and a sense of inevitability that was shaped by family narratives:

> My whole family's got it, my mum's got it, and her mum had it, it obviously goes round in the genes innit, like I hope I haven't caught something […] we all suffered from quite a lot of trauma with men and unhealthiness and shit, and then going on to destroy ourselves with drugs and stuff.

Rosie described mental health as something catchable, even though she understood there were also patterns of trauma and destructive coping mechanisms. However, rather than something genetic as Rosie described, Ben talked about the generational impact in terms of repeated behaviours:

> The reason why a lot of people are the way they are, is because they're reflecting off their parents […] 9 times out of 10, right, if a man is beating a woman and the kid sees it, what's that kid gunna do when they're older?

Ben recognised that patterns of violence repeat themselves but leaves a small chance that intergenerational patterns can be changed.

Although most participants talked about the origins of their mental health difficulties stemming from childhood, Isabella pinpoints a single event as an adult as the trigger:

> I don't think I've really had problems with mental health until everything that happened to me […] Since I got sliced and that.

"I know I'm not right": Understanding of mental health difficulties

However, for John it was not just about negative events, but how they were understood that mattered when thinking about mental health difficulties:

> We all have hurt, we all love, we all hate. We all have good times, we all have bad times. It's the perception of how you deal with it, that determines the outcome of where you're gunna go.

There is a sense of emotions and events, including negative ones, being universal and that bad times are inevitable. This is shared by Chris:

> You're okay for a while, um, but then something else in life might happen, you never know what's gonna happen tomorrow.

Chris described a sense of transience and unpredictability with his mental health, and a belief that you can be knocked back again even when things feel stable. Being able to understand personal experiences was considered important across participants and Liam described how his mental health can feel unknowable:

> I don't know half of the shit that's going on with me. But I know, I know it's definitely something not, not right you know, I know I'm not right.

He described a sense that something is not right with him, and continued, saying he would want support to help him understand himself more:

> I would love to have them come and help me, and maybe like, tell me what was going on with me, you know what I'm saying? So I'll know exactly what's what.

He shared that when he was younger, he experienced anger, but this was not necessarily the real problem:

> I didn't understand it, I didn't know what depression was. So I yeah, I would get angry, I would smash doors and walls and things and smashed my hands up and, yeah, and it was depression.

Mental health was understood in terms of experiences, rather than being diagnostically led but a doctor was the main mental health support for most participants. Many felt that medication was the only support offered. There was a frustration due to medical professionals being quick to prescribe, rather than taking time to understand the problem. James described his feelings on this:

> They're quick to put stuff down as, like you know, oh we'll just medicate and medicate and medicate. And a year later and nothing's changed and it's not actually got to the root cause at all.

Oliver also talked about ending up like a "walking pharmacy" when all he wanted was to understand what was going on for him.

"I've been let down": Experiences of help-seeking and services

An experience that came up with every participant was at least one, if not several, past experiences of services being rejecting, inconsistent, and feeling let down. For some, this was due to their early experiences, as John shared:

> As a child I had a psychiatrist in a different country. And… they locked me up.

This sense of not getting suitable support stemmed into adulthood:

> I've been let down, I've trusted somebody to help and they've passed me from pillar to post, post to pillar, that's a confusing situation for anybody to be in.

This experience of being passed around across the lifespan was shared by many participants, as Sofia says:

> Help started when I was nine with more therapists than you could shake a stick at, but that kind of makes it all worse [because] you've gotta re-tell it.

Although Sofia hoped to access mental health support in the future, for Amelia, feeling let down led to her not wanting to access mental health services again:

> I wouldn't even access it, cause they're crap, they're absolutely crap. They don't, they don't help you with what you need help with.

Amelia's experience of mental health was tied in with social service requirements and assessments and "they use that against you". Not only did Amelia describe mental health being used against her, but for her support came too late:

> Because I didn't have a diagnosis, they took my little boy off of me. […] then I got the ADHD diagnosis but that don't help because my son's been adopted.

A lack of trust did not just come from mental health services, and Oliver described an incident where he experienced racial prejudice from his local police force:

> I did lose faith in the police. And then when you lose, you know, you think yourself you lose faith in the police, you know nothing will protect you like.

He went on to describe how reputations matched his experience:

> … they were both sexist and racist from what I heard, like, and kind of when you read things like that, I kind of think, well, yeah, no wonder I had no help from them.

Oliver continued to say how this lack of trust now applied universally to services, including mental health who "brainwash you", which is why he had not accessed support. He elaborated:

> So many promises and lies in all different systems, and you just, you're thinking I'm fed up of hearing this and hearing that, and then it don't happen.

There was a general understanding across participants that mental health services were stretched and underfunded. Some spoke about how changes needed to happen at a government level. Chris said:

> It's very, very strained. Urm, possibly it needs to go as high as the government […] I know they're suffering.

Chris described a duality that services are suffering alongside the people who access them. Funding cuts impacting helpful services was also raised by Liam, who spoke about a positive experience in a rehabilitation centre:

> The funding, well it ran out and nobody would refund it. And then that was that. Generally that's what happens.

Sofia went on to explicitly name mental health and homelessness as things that desperately need funding:

> Look at the services which don't even have enough funding to keep it going. […] the amount of homeless people who, if they were given the chance to speak to like to a mental health service, would jump at it. We just can't because there is no-one. It's heart-breaking.

Barriers

Every participant spoke about barriers they faced around service access. For many the difficulties came before they even got into a service. Amelia described that often people do not know how, or where, to go:

> It's all done by Internet and not a lot of homeless people have phones, so they would have to go to the library or speak to someone at an agency that would be able to help them. Then it's finding that cause you don't even have to Google Maps.

However, Sofia described how it goes beyond information sharing, due to the impact of illiteracy in homeless populations:

> A lot of people out here can't even read and write […] the doctor will go, yeah, just sign all this paperwork, and they sit and sit there looking at it like 'err?, how am I gunna read that?'

Other participants knew how to access support, but felt like barriers were put in their way. Chris described how:

> I've had to relive what I've been through three times in one day, by the time I got to [service], I was, I was going mad. I was kicking off. I did apologise afterwards because, erm, you know that's not really me.

Services for Chris made him act in a way that he did not like; even when he finally got support he worried that it was not adequate:

> Am I going to be better in 2 1/2 months or am I going to get to the end of that and still be suffering from stress. Where do I turn then?

There was something important about being met where you are at, when you need the support, rather than being referred on. Lucas says:

> Oh yeah we'll refer you on, you'll be put on a waiting list, hah, 12 months down the line when you've lost all motivation to work, work with the people who want to work on your mental health, you get a phone call and it's like, fuck off mate.

He noted that even if you are motivated to get help, asking for it not always easy:

> People sometimes don't have the self-worth or courage to get up and go to them and say that I need help.

Services need to do more than just reduce barriers, and instead should be proactive in finding the people that need them. Liam suggested:

> I think they should go out and search more for people rather than wait for them to come to them […] Trouble is some of these places they're so busy that and understaffed you just get forgotten about.

For him there was a feeling that you can get lost in the system and the environment of having combined support makes these harder as difficult interpersonal relationships mean "some people probably won't come".

Chris was unique in that he was currently accessing mental health support, but even with support he struggled:

> I try to do the breathing exercises […] you might be trying to do that, and there might be an argument going off behind you.

"You're on your own": Self-help and self-preservation

Some participants felt that the only way they could get support was to go to extreme measures. Sofia talked openly about a suicide attempt:

> Two days later I had social services knocking on the door. And I'm like so you wrote me off when I was 8 or 9, and now you're wanting to come back on to the scene after doing fuck all for the last god knows how many years of my life.

Sofia felt like she needed support from services from a young age, but due to a lack of it, suicide felt like it became her only option. There was an anger that this was when services finally offered the support she wanted. Oliver had a similar experience, but rather than support he received a prison sentence:

> I had a breakdown […] tried to blow my head off, it just didn't work, and because of what I done, obviously it's a danger to other people and that's how I got a criminal record for it.

However, despite his criminal record Oliver shared his surprise that it got him the help that he needed. Prison was seen as the best way of getting support for several participants, and Isabella noted the unfairness of this:

> You shouldn't have to go and crime just to get help.

For others, like James, there was a feeling that unless you go to extreme measures you do not get support.

> I don't meet a threshold for like mental health issues […] and it's almost like, see you later. You're on your own. If I wasn't trying to see my children, I would have no problem just saying like you know what, I think I'm going to kill myself, if it's just going to get me off the street, even if it's true or not.

John talked about how talking meant having to face reality "and it's not a nice place. And so everyone escapes, whether it be drugs, alcohol, or what". The use of illegal drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism was talked about by most participants. Lucas described how services need to understand that people use drugs for a reason, and it should not be a barrier to access:

> It's still 'well you're taking mind altering substances'. Well, hang on here. I'm taking that for a fucking reason. Get real. It's common sense.

This is reflective of the acknowledgement that substances both offer relief from mental health difficulties, but also exacerbate other factors; it is not an easy place to be. Whilst problematic substance use for coping was discussed by the majority, it was not true of everyone. John's form of escapism was driving ("I tend to drive a lot rather than think a lot") and for others it was about being able to reframe their situation. Oliver described how:

> I play a game of like what you call reverse psychology. You know something's really getting to you, just think of it as part of something to help you.

"You get it all out": Perspectives on mental health needs

All participants spoke about the importance of having someone to talk to. John talked about the impact of loneliness:

> When you got no one to talk to, that's when you start to feel the loneliness of everything and loneliest is the most common killer to any generation.

Amelia noted the importance of building connections with professionals in order to be open, and recognised that this takes time and effort, and Liam noted the importance of professionals just spending time with people:

> … just go around these places to generally talk to people really because you'll find all that out just by doing that, just by sitting down and having a cup of tea.

There was a sense that support needed to feel more casual than clinical. Sofia describes an ideal environment as "a chilled out area with someone who looks friendly but has that knowledge of what to do" and in this space: "you scream, you rant, you rage, you cry… but you get it all out. And then you can go back next week if you need to."

For Sofia support was more than talking, it was about letting out emotions in a safe way. Some participants had places where they had this support, from probation workers ("I just need to vent and she just listened to me" – Liam), to doctors, to hostel staff; it mattered less about who offered the support, but simply that it was there. John described his social-prescriber:

> [She] doesn't judge me […] you talk about what matters to you and they sort of introduce it in a way that isn't mental health, mental health, mental health.

Although Sofia talked about the importance of being able to talk to friends, as well as professionals, she also recognised the emotional impact it has, particularly when they have similar experiences.

> If you do lose a friend or a family member out here, you blame yourself. […] if we had a little thing where we had people sit and listen to homeless people, it could, it could extend their lives slightly, because they feel like they've actually got someone to talk to who cares.

Whilst acknowledging peer support as important, she recognised that this is often not enough and professional help is needed. Whilst having someone to talk to was seen as integral for most participants, for Ben, good support did not need to involve words:

> Animals are a good thing for mental health people to have, because emotional support is better than anything in life […] they don't argue, they don't talk back to you [laughs] all they can do is just show love.

Whilst talking may help, having a connection with a living being was ultimately the most important thing, but services need to be aware of the homeless context when offering support as a number of difficulties of being homeless were given. For some, like Liam, it was the routine of being homeless ("you're always on the move

[…] the world is going too fast for me") and it is unclear whether his sense of fastness was the result of or cause of homelessness; for Amelia, homelessness was very much the cause of her problems:

> Homelessness causes mental health because you don't know where you're gonna sleep, don't know where you're gonna eat, […] I'm constantly on edge, having glass bottles thrown at my tent and that, with a baby inside of me […] I've got really, really bad anxiety. And I've been crying quite a lot lately.

Amelia talked about the impact of violence, which is made harder with pregnancy due to an increased sense of vulnerability. Feeling exposed was shared across participants, but was particularly prominent for females. Isabella described herself as "more vulnerable" when homeless and said:

> You gotta be awake, you gotta be alert. I can't even put my hood up when I go out.

Despite this, some men also spoke of the impact of street violence, as Liam shared:

> Even though I'm a grown-arse man, I'm still scared.

This sense of vulnerability was also explored by several participants who note the increased mortality within the homeless population. Isabella noted "it's not good out here, for nobody" and grief and loss was spoken about. Sofia noted how services need to be responsive to bereavements:

> I know four that have died in the last month, all cause they've been trying to use things as blockers and there's bad batches going around. It's… heartbreaking. But then that leads more people to need more help from mental health services because they just lost close friends, close family. It's an endless circle.

Although the majority off participants spoke of how homelessness worsened their mental health, Ben spoke of how he found his mental health had improved:

> When I live in a house my mental health goes really bad but living on the street, my mental health goes fine because I'm free in my head. I don't have no restrictions […] you can back yourself away from everyone.

However, although Ben talked about the benefits for him, he acknowledged:

> No one should feel like that, better off on the street, you know what I mean? And it's cause I've been on the street for 2 1/2 years. It's just normal to me now.

Ben recognised the impact of normalisation of his experiences on the streets, and that if things had been changed in the past maybe he would feel differently now.

Discussion

This IPA study explored PEH's perceptions of mental health, mental health services, and any perceived barriers or facilitators to access. Five GETS emerged:

Origins of mental health, understanding of mental health difficulties, experiences of help-seeking and services, self-help and self-preservation and, perspectives on mental health needs.

'Origins of mental health' represented how participants understood the cause of their mental health difficulties, with most stemming from traumatic events that were linked to childhood and family narratives. *'Understanding of mental health'* represented how participants want to better understand themselves and the causes of their behaviours and coping mechanisms. '*Experiences of help seeking and services'* highlighted how services have let participants down over the years, either through individual or systemic failures, including racism, over-prescribing, and funding cuts. *'Self-help and self-preservation'* incorporated what participants found protective for their mental health, the extreme measures people have needed to go to get support, and the need for an acceptance and understanding of their survival mechanisms*. 'Perspectives on mental health needs'* focused on building meaningful connections, reducing stigma, how being homeless directly impacts mental health experiences, and getting the right support is vital.

Despite the only mental health input for many participants being their GP, participants did not give a bio-medical understanding of mental health. Instead, they spoke of it in terms of life events, understandings, and family influence. Psychiatric definitions are important, as they hold relevance for policy makers and are helpful for monitoring and outcomes; indeed this is how we know that prevalence of mental health problems is so high for people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness. However, when supporting PEH, diagnosing and prescribing medication may be pathologising of their coping mechanisms. People with mental health issues risk epistemic injustice (Crichton et al., 2017) and have their interpretations discounted in lieu of professional knowledge, which along with the stigma participants reported feeling, may add to a sense of not being understood and increase stigma around mental health and coping mechanisms. Similarly, despite many acknowledging using drugs or alcohol as their way of coping, participants rejected the over-prescribing of medication for mental health, with many feeling it does not help them understand the true cause of their issues.

Whilst not dismissing biological underpinnings of mental health, the 'Power Threat Meaning Framework' [PTMF] by Johnstone et al (2018) offers a different perspective focusing on both seeing people as individuals, whilst understanding limiting factors within society: the focus becomes 'what's happened to you?' rather than 'what's

wrong with you?'. The PTMF focuses on how power and threats impact on someone's life and how people understand and respond to these. Participants spoke of power and threat across their life: from childhood trauma, to government and service level barriers, to violence on the streets and the impact of stigma. Although there is a growing evidence base for the efficacy of psychological intervention (e.g., Bodley-Scott et al., 2024) collaborative understandings are important (Ness et al., 2014) and the PTMF is person-centred, validates individual experiences, and is contextually sensitive, which would support discussions around the impact of homelessness itself. Participants spoke of wanting to get to 'the core', and there is a need to continue to develop evidence for affective interventions that align with PEH needs and contribute to best practice guidance, e.g., NICE.

Stigma may be a bigger barrier than previously thought. Whilst the stigma of being homeless is a known barrier to accessing healthcare (Mejia-Lancheros et al., 2020; Reilly et al., 2022), participants spoke about how this interacts with both male identity and the stigma of having mental health difficulties. Whilst male identity and mental health stigma has been raised previously (Chatmon, 2020), a greater understanding is needed about how this may worsen health outcomes when combined with homelessness in order to find solutions. Additionally, both the stigma of being homeless and the impact of homelessness itself were described as exacerbating mental health difficulties. Housing First is an internationally used approach that provides people with complex needs a stable home alongside person-centred support (Homeless Link, 2024). Although it has shown positive results internationally for housing stability (Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000), health (Peng et al., 2020), and other holistic outcomes (Homeless Link, 2024), it is still only a small proportion of people in the UK who are able to receive this service (Homeless Link, 2020). There is a need to grow this approach and despite the clear benefits of the approach, there is mixed evidence on the impact of Housing First on social and clinical outcomes (Tsai, 2020), relational difficulties (Cole, 2023), and multidisciplinary working, including mental health, within communities are needed alongside to ensure holistic support is offered.

Whilst IPA facilitates an understanding of shared experiences of a population, it is important to note differences too. Whilst all participants were adults experiencing homelessness, they differed in age, gender, and ethnicity, and these characteristics may result in different experiences. For example, relational violence is more likely to be experienced and cause homelessness for women (Magnusson and Davidge, 2020), and an awareness of gendered differences is important (e.g., Radcliffe et al., 2024). Ethnic groups, other than white, are over-represented in homeless data across England, but it is particularly marked in the Southwest (Finney, 2022), where this data was collected. Notably, Oliver was the only non-white participant, which may say something about how, where, and if PEH from ethnic minorities are

accessing support. Oliver talked about how police contact and imprisonment had impacted his views of services. There is an overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2022) and inpatient units (Barnett et al., 2019), which may play into a lack of trust that contributes to the health inequalities minoritised others face (Kapadia, 2022) and services may need to do more to reach them. Whilst statistical data helps highlight this difference, more research is needed to understand sub-groups' experiences of homelessness and service access to see if additional or varying support is needed, beyond what this paper and others suggest. Whilst a growing number of services offer trauma-informed policies (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022), offering additional support to wider services (e.g., police, social services) around dual-diagnosis, psychological understandings, etc,. may aid in ensuring PEH get their needs met across multidisciplinary networks.

Many of the barriers that participants spoke about have been well-documented in the literature around PEH and healthcare; this includes digital poverty (Heaslip et al., 2021), location barriers, preferring face-to-face (Adams et al., 2022), and a lack of empathy from professionals alongside a lack of trust in services (Ramsay et al., 2019). Many participants had dual-diagnosis needs and used substances to cope, but also felt it was a barrier to service access and support. Policies to support dual-diagnosis working do not go far enough (Alsuhaibani et al., 2021) and focus needs to be on developing pathways to support the mental health of people alongside, and regardless of, motivation for substance-use reduction. The 'NHS Long Term Plan' (NHS England, 2019) proposed £30 million to provide better access to specialist mental health services for PEH, and the NICE guidelines supporting PEH healthcare (2022) goes some way to addressing these barriers. It is a step in the right direction, and early examples of more inclusive services are positive (e.g., Scott-Gatty and Cant, 2021), although continued evaluation of efficacy is needed to address the limited evidence-base.

However, many participants had made their judgements about services based on their past experiences and felt government policies hindered them further. Some participants felt that they would not access services based on what had previously happened, and notably this was not just the impact of mental health services, but of other systems such as legal, social services, and criminal justice too, with some of the problem stemming from childhood interventions. Where the damage is already done, mental health services may need to do more than just offer flexible outreach services for PEH. They need to be proactive in communicating what they offer and demonstrating how they can be trusted, in order to reach those who are still not attending, and prevent PEH from resorting to extreme and harmful actions

to get the help they need; rather than best intention, this proactive outreach needs to be written into policies tackling health inequalities (e.g., Pathway Policies for Inclusion Health) and co-designed alongside people with lived experience.

Whilst participants talked about needing mental health support, it is worth noting that what they describe as being desirable is not necessarily how traditional statutory services have to offer. Although two participants spoke of the value of learning 'skills', all participants spoke of the importance of having someone that they could reliably talk to about anything, not just mental health, which is markedly different to most evidence-based psychological or psychiatric model-specific interventions and medical prescribing. Given what we know about PEH and attachment styles, it may be that attachment-informed practice is key (Barreto & Cockersell, 2024) and services need to focus more on relational aspects of building safe spaces than targeted interventions per se. This is particularly important when considering the impact of vicarious trauma on staff, and the role that bereavement and loss may have on staff and service-users alike (Valoroso and Stedmon, 2020; Monk et al., 2023). At an organisational level there is a systemic need to recognise and manage the parallel processes between traumatised people and traumatised services (Bloom, 2014). Perhaps the role of professionals, including clinical psychologists, is to hold a meta-position offering consultation and psychologically-informed training to both staff and senior management across a range of services supporting PEH. Building relationships, both within and between organisations, might facilitate the creation of sufficiently containing spaces to engage such a vulnerable client group, and facilitate person-centred approaches that are both sensitive to, and respectful of, the client and their needs.

In keeping with other qualitative approaches, the findings from IPA studies are not generalisable, but there is some transferability of meaning to like services and participants elsewhere. This research contributes to the growing literature on how best to support PEH with their mental health; it offers not just an understanding of the barriers and facilitators to accessing services but insights into how PEH themselves understand the term 'mental health' in relation to their experiences. The growing pace of homelessness in the UK necessitates that change happens quickly; providing the right support at the right time may prevent the vicious cycles that leave people feeling entrenched in homelessness.

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Activism and Research in Arctic Homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland)

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Abstract_ *One percent of a population of 56 500 people were counted as homeless in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) in 2022. The social problem has been on the rise since the industrialisation period in the 1960s. It is caused by a housing crisis, inadequate social and political attention, and a lack of rights-based legislation in the area. After introducing the colonial historical context, which dates back centuries, the article discusses the current situation regarding the particularity and origin of homelessness in this part of the Arctic. For the past 10 years, researchers at Ilisimatusarfik Centre for Arctic Welfare have focused on homelessness by conducting fieldwork in a local soup kitchen, fieldwork with outreach teams, teaching shelter staff, and organising the nation's first PIT count. The research has an activist social justice focus, with public hearings and increased media attention around issues such as poverty, lack of social and housing support, and the general situation for people living with long-term homelessness. This engagement has resulted in a national strategy and a definition of homelessness, which are important first steps toward real change.*

Keywords_ *Greenland, Arctic, social policy, homelessness, activism*

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Introduction

Close to 1% of the population was counted as homeless in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) in 2022. Homelessness has been growing since the 1960s. The focus of this article is to report on the last 10 years of social scientific research about homelessness in this part of the Arctic by discussing classic field studies (Arnfjord, 2021a; 2022b; Arnfjord and Perry, 2023; Perry, 2022), and quantitative studies (Arnfjord and Perry, 2022). We approach homelessness from an activist and social-political understanding, which means going beyond documentation and looking to change what we perceive as unjust conditions for a large minority compared to numbers in Europe. Kalaallit Nunaat had 1% homeless in 2022. In comparison, in the same year, Belgium had 0.004%, Sweden had 0.003%, and Denmark had 0.001% (FEANTSA, 2024).

Contextual background

Kalaallit Nunaat is the world's biggest island, with a population of 56 500 people, mainly consisting of indigenous Kalaallit (Inuit). The nation has been colonised by Denmark since 1721 and is still part of the Danish Realm. Few towns are connected by roads, and thus transport and travel depend on air travel, sea travel, and dog sleds when the season permits it. The self-rule government has autonomy over areas such as taxation, commerce, housing, health, education, and social affairs. Colonisation links the welfare system to a Danish welfare system with high levels of taxation and public spending. There are universal benefits such as free education, free health care, medicine, and dentistry. The social system has some protection from unemployment, though not as high as in Denmark, and a similar pension system. Social services are delegated to five large municipalities. Nuuk is the capital city, with a population of 20 000. It is also the country's administrative, educational, and health care centre. The population consists mainly of 88% born in Kalaallit Nunaat and 12% born outside the country. Most people live in towns with between 1 000 and 5 000 inhabitants. Around 12% of the population live in small settlements with fewer than 400 inhabitants. On a national level, the unemployment rate is low, around 3-5 percent (Statistics Greenland, 2024).

Understanding homelessness from an Arctic perspective in relation to European and North American homelessness

Homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat differs from homelessness on the more interconnected and multicultural European continent and in North America. Because the infrastructure forces people in Kalaallit Nunaat to settle in their town of employment, homelessness does not resemble the traveling hobo researched by Anderson, Solenberger, and Harper. Their research focused on the individual migrant worker. Early on, hobos were stigmatised as drifters and examples of idleness and laziness

(Anderson, 1923; Harper, 1982; Solenberger, 1911). As a result of North American and European conservative ideologies many were sent to labour camps. Spradley (1988) criticises these disciplinary measures against public drinking because they only result in further marginalisation and continual jail sentences. For centuries, decision-makers in the West have targeted the poor and the homeless through legislation. Similar punitive measures were introduced when Kalaallit Nunaat saw its first formulated system for social help: a division of social services targeting a productive part of the population, which was deemed worthy of receiving help, and an unproductive part deemed not worthy of help. The 'non-productives' received poor benefits in the 1850s (Rinch, 1857). That thinking has since lingered and has come up in relation to laziness, drunkenness, and unemployment in the 1960s (Rasmussen, 1965; Redaktionen, 1965; Simonsen, 1958).

European research on homelessness between the 1960s and 1980s was dominated by health and mental health research. Few social studies focused on marginalisation and the causes of homelessness. There were some efforts to humanise the people behind the homeless label (Borg, 1976; Giggs and Whynes, 1988; Greve et al., 1971; Lindelius and Salum, 1976). For both Europe and Northern America, the '80s marked a turning point. Bahr and Caplow (1973) together with Barak (1991), discussed shifts resulting in hobos, tramps, and poverty related to cracks in the economy and a predominantly middle-aged male problem. After the 1980s, homelessness is also understood as a social problem affecting women and families, related to poverty, unemployment, and a housing crisis (Harman, 1989; Rousseau, 1981). In his well-known work *Down and Out in America*, Rossi (1989) talked about extreme poverty and the concept of homelessness as being a literal thing, as opposed to precarious homelessness – having a tenuous hold on housing of the poorest quality. Since its beginning, homelessness research has also focused on welfare and work migration. At the end of his anthology *Walking to Work*, Monkkonen (1984) writes: "Our ignorance of tramps is not that the sources don´t exist, but that tramps simply do not fit our visions of the past, even the most critical ones. They were poor, mostly single working men (and sometimes women)" (p.235). Back then, this was also activism in the form of giving a voice to societal groups that didn't fit the majority's version of society. In Kalaallit Nunaat, there is a general push effect from smaller towns into bigger towns, and eventually to Nuuk, due to job availability, better health care services, schools, and lower living costs. The same migrant pattern has been discussed on the European continent for 30 years (Borjas and Trejo, 1991). People are seeking out better healthcare services, social services, higher housing standards, and employment in the urbanised areas (Riva et al., 2021; Schiermacher, 2020; Watson, 2017). There is also a level of emigration from Kalaallit

Nunaat to Denmark, where Kalaallit can settle due to citizenship of the State. Denmark offers higher welfare services than are available in Kalaallit Nunaat. The level of emigration has yet to be analysed with more qualitative data.

Defining Homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat

Kalaallit Nunaat has been without a homeless definition since the social problem started occurring in the 1980s, though definitions may pave the way for a general conceptualisation and recognition of a given phenomenon as a social problem. More importantly, it may lay the foundation for new rights-based legislation so that people in these circumstances can receive universal benefits similar to legislation around pensions and health care. We also need the municipalities to be precise about what social services are available in the form of shelters, health care, and necessities for survival. Some researchers deem homelessness almost indefinable. Bahr and Caplow (1973) discussed paradoxical cases of the missionary priest or the deployed soldier not being considered homeless, while the residents spending decades at the same homeless shelter are categorised as homeless. In a Kalaallit Nunaat context, we could add sailors and trawler workers who spend months at sea; however, they are not considered homeless. We also have reports of people living in the same shelters for a decade who are considered homeless (Nielsen, 2025). Much current European and North American research does focus on the home as a material frame when focusing on the ground breaking *Housing First* approach (Aubry et al., 2015; Tsemberis, 2013). When the Kalaallit public authorities first produced reports on homelessness, they adopted a material frame of understanding homelessness as either homeless, re-housed, or houseless (Hansen and Andersen, 2013). Homelessness was then defined as: "people that don't have a steady place to spend the night" (Hansen and Andersen, 2013, p.10). The definition didn't include geographical variations in understanding homelessness, such as rural homelessness, where a distinct culture of rurality is discussed and solutions to homelessness are sought in close-knit communities via benevolent landlords, extended families, and such (Cloke et al., 2001). There are, however, also limits to rural solutions, with risks of social isolation and abandonment (Carpenter-Song et al., 2016).

Recent publications discussing challenges with defining homelessness indicate that there are issues with the overall definitions used in homeless counts, such as shelter counts, where data sets have an overrepresentation of men (Bretherton and Mayock, 2024; Bretherton and Pleace, 2024; Treglia and Culhane, 2023). Arguments are also made for the need for separate definitions around youth homelessness. An important point in the debate around definitions is to use a housing continuum between a narrow definition, like the physical domain (being shelters), and the social domain, which involves having access to a space for social relations. There

are several important and relevant frameworks, categorisations, and typologies to consider (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2024). During one of our many field studies, we had a conversation with a local shelter manager. This was before a public definition of homelessness. During the conversation, we asked if he would participate in the homeless count, and he replied, "Yes, but it shouldn't include the people here in my shelter – because they have a home." By this, he indicated that rooms with 2-3 bunk beds housing up to six people were equivalent to a home. Eventually, we managed to convince him that we would be very grateful if he would let us include his shelter users in the count.

Ahead of the first count in Kalaallit Nunaat, we looked carefully at FEANTSA's ETHOS definition of home as:

> Having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain). (FEANTSA, 2005, p.1)

We chose to go for a definition that would better fit the culture, context, and data gathered so far. The definition that finally became official was: "People in this social situation do not have the current resources to choose their own safe and secure accommodation where they can legally stay indefinitely" (Departementet for Sociale Anliggender, Arbejdsmarked og Indenrigsanliggender, 2023, p.12). Safety and security became additional explicit key elements when talking about homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat.

The Historical Context

When tracking homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat, it is not until the mid-1960s that we begin to see news stories about the extreme consequences of centralisation and a housing shortage, with a reported housing shortage of 2 495 in Nuuk in the 1970s, with a then population of around 8 000 (Christensen, 1964; Redaktionen, 1974). Homelessness is concentrated mainly around the capital, Nuuk, but there are severe housing and social issues in places like Tasiilaq on the east coast, Ilulissat in the north, and Qaqortoq in the south as well. The Kalaallit became home-owners and renters just after World War II.

Nuuk opened its first shelter in 1977 (Atuagagdliutit, 1977; Jensen, 1982) and there have been several variants of sheltering the homeless with varying degrees of success – there is currently a plan to have a more comprehensive approach to people experiencing homelessness in the capital. There are currently three emergency shelters in Nuuk, with a total of 88 sleeping spaces. All shelters are

emergency shelters, meaning that the facilities open at 3 p.m. and close at 9 a.m. This continues in February with a mean temperature of -8 degrees Celsius. There have been attempts to set up transitional housing in former container homes and in local housing blocks. The housing containers are placed in a secluded and marginalised area of Nuuk. The housing blocks were, however, quickly struck by NIMBY issues due to neighbours' complaints and a lack of preparation by local authorities. There is no affordable housing plan in Kalaallit Nunaat. The country's housing stock consists of 71% publicly owned housing. The waiting list for public housing in Nuuk is 10-12 years for individuals. People can be listed on the waiting list after turning 15 years of age.

Following this introduction, I will touch upon industrialisation and the housing crisis, social policies, and individualisation as effects of colonisation. I will sum up by describing the overall approach and activist research and discuss how, by going beyond data gathering in the field, we might succeed in changing political and public perceptions of homelessness from a victim-blaming tendency to an understanding of how we demolish structural barriers.

Particularities in homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat

In Kalaallit Nunaat, homelessness is monocultural. This means we hardly encounter Danes who are experiencing homelessness. If adult Danes are not working or retired, they migrate to Denmark. The same goes for people on a work visa, who will migrate out of the country. There are no veterans with PTSD or refugees. There are no hard drugs in the homeless community, only cannabis and alcohol (Arnfjord, 2019), and no comorbidity in the form of tuberculosis or HIV/AIDS. The demographic/migration pattern is movements from smaller settlements to towns, and finally to Nuuk or Denmark (Rasmussen, 2010). Once a person in a housing crisis settles in Nuuk, there are hardly any affordable living options or possibilities for commuting in and out, as is the case in Anchorage, Alaska, where people can set up camps in the forest, live in trailer homes, or stay in their cars (Boots, 2023).

Industrialisation and the housing crisis

Historically, the Kalaallit were nomadic, moving with the land and sea mammals. They had winter settlements and summer settlements. Between 1700 and 1800, when the Danes set up a trading post, the Kalaallit began to settle in permanent settlements and towns. They settled because of a growing capitalisation through trade activities with the Danes. The need for housing emerged from this settling and was promoted by colonising politics in the 1950s and 1960s. The tents (tupec) and the stone huts (illuut) were turned into houses (illu is still a house but is now referred to as a wooden house or apartment building and not a stone hut). The colonising of living conditions went hand in hand with better sanitation, as well as ownership and

rental agreements. All land in Greenland is public land. There is no such thing as private land ownership. Nobody inherits land or anything similar. House owners enter into an agreement of land allocation with the public authorities.

Homelessness in Kalaallit Nunaat is, like in many places, about housing and poverty. Before 1930, almost everything revolved around the hunt. Hunters needed access to kayaks, hunting equipment, and, most importantly, good-quality skin clothes. Everything relied on a collective culture that was dependent on everyone's participation and shared focus. It wasn't a 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' kind of society. It was closer to the society described in Durkheim's theory of mechanical solidarity: one with collective values, beliefs, and, we can add, common goals about furthering that society through hunting (Durkheim, 2000). Kalaallit culture is complex and vibrant, but with a unified focus on nature and hunting as a central food source (Lynge, 1992; Petersen and Lynge, 2004).

By 1910, fishing surpassed hunting in terms of economic measurements. Early biological expeditions by the Danish State concluded that the waters around Greenland contained many cod, which were needed to feed a growing population. The Danish colonial power decided to switch the Kalaallit's focus to fishing. After the 1950s, the Danish State pushed colonial politics of industrialisation and especially capitalisation by forcing a transformation from independent homeowners and hunters into fishermen and renters, creating a working class. People had the option of buying what was called a do-it-yourself/pre-fabricated house for which they paid a mortgage, or they could rent from the municipalities (Redaktionen, 1961).

When Danish planners persuaded many to move to Nuuk and fish all year round, they didn't consider the part of the population that also followed but didn't fish, and the ramifications of an exponentially growing workforce. Would everyone be working? Would everyone just transition willingly from an independent hunting lifestyle to being part of an industrial workforce with a dependent lifestyle and a 9-to-5 mindset? The planners counted on a steady pay-cheque being the sole motivating factor, with improved living standards in addition. No apparent social planning went into the process in the 1950s and 1960s; it was what Weber named instrumental rationalism or purpose rationality (in German: *zweckrational*) (Weber and Roth, 1968) or what could be called engineerism. The gaze was locked on the working and middle class, which had appeared here, like everywhere else, with industrialisation. In the 1950s, there was little administrative focus on social problems. So, the minority of the population that had social problems were not paid attention to. In the 1960s, concerns started to grow about alcohol consumption and unemployment (Udvalget For Samfundsforskning I Grønland, 1961). There were

worrying news reports about idleness and a loss of purpose among the young generation (Janus, 1964). Similar social problems are recognisable in many industrialisation histories. In Kalaallit Nunaat, this coincides with colonisation as well.

A Looming Housing Crisis

Housing as a political topic is constantly a part of the current news cycle (Christensen and Arnfjord, 2020). Between 1920 and 1960, housing construction relied on wood, but then followed a period when concrete apartment buildings took place; an efficient but not culturally appropriate way to offer housing (Christensen et al., 2024; Grønlands Tekniske Organisation, 1968; GTO, 1968; 1973). Housing blocks designed in Denmark suited a northern European way of life, but didn't fit a culture where seal hunting, carving, and skin drying were significant parts of life (Chemnitz et al., 1975). In the 1980s, a slow but steady liberalisation of the former public housing market appeared. Currently, it is only in a few cities (Aasiaat, Ilulissat, Nuuk, Qaqortoq, and Sisimiut) that a prospective house owner can get a real estate loan.

Housing prices in Nuuk have skyrocketed over the past 30 years. In 2007, the Municipal Government planned seven housing towers in downtown. This was hailed as cheap accommodation. However, from the time block 1 was finished to the time block 7 was built, construction costs had increased by 7.2% (Netredaktionen, 2008). There is currently a universal challenge with building cheaply enough. In Kalaallit Nunaat, there is no political programme oriented toward affordable housing, and no current plan to subsidise the existing housing stock. For a working-class family in the mean monthly income group (€3 250 per person), over half of the monthly pay cheque is spent on rent in a newly developed area called Qinngorput, compared to the older and more dated housing where the rent is close to a quarter of the monthly pay. The housing crisis does not seem to stop. The municipality is continually building housing, but it is in a price range for the middle to upper middle class. Consequently, everybody else is pushed out of the housing market. In the following, we focus on the correlation between social policies and homelessness.

Social policy and homelessness

Kalaallit Nunaat has had full authority over social policies since the Home Rule Act of 1979.[1] Different social policy areas, such as the well-being of children, early retirement, and the elderly, take priority over matters such as homelessness and poverty. Recently, we saw an adjustment to the social legislation that now emphasises workfare in contrast to the social help orientation in the prior legislation. Help is still a core concept of social legislation where needs-based assessment and

[1] I have argued elsewhere that it may go further back (Arnfjord, 2022a).

punitive measures ensure that recipients of public benefits live up to their obligations. The law literally translates into The Inatsisartut Law about Help from the Public (Inatsisartutlov Om Offentlig Hjælp, 2022). If they fail, they run the risk of benefits being halved or completely removed. When it comes to children or people with disabilities, there are legal measures that ensure the rights of the citizen, but a general law that ensures the legal certainty of the citizen does not exist. Homelessness, in a social justice sense, is still an area with few legislative rights. There is no mention of homelessness in any legislation.

The results are few formulated rights for shelter users, people sleeping in encampments, stairwells, etc. In Nuuk, there are three NGOs operating within the homeless environment. There are two full-time services. One is Kofoeds Skole, which was originally a Danish initiative. It is a day programme that aims to integrate people into the labour market (Meldgaard, 2005). It recently started a youth division. Kofoeds Skole is funded by the municipality and is currently run by the former mayor of Nuuk, but is an independent (non-profit) organisation. The second outfit is the Salvation Army, which started operating in Nuuk in 2012 (Arnfjord, 2021b; Pressemeddelelse, 2014). It also runs a day programme that functions as a day shelter, operating from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on weekdays. The only after-hours initiative is the soup kitchen run by NoINI, a small NGO that relies on funds from the Kalaallit Nunaat Rødekorsiat (Red Cross) and other small donations. NoINI only operates on Wednesdays and provides food by borrowing facilities from The Salvation Army.

Collectively, the NGOs are working to push for more rights-based legislation. Small successes have been accomplished, but we have yet to see focused legislative work, such as affordable housing acts, inclusion programmes in the labour market and educational system, and social welfare cards. The politicians and the media sometimes have a singular focus when it comes to big political agendas. In the spring of 2024, almost every news story was about a new fishing act, which is core legislation relating to the nation's economy. It dominated the news coverage for weeks on end. There was very little political focus on homelessness in the National Assembly in the spring of 2024. What happens with homelessness when there is little political attention is possibly a repeat of history: the social problem will grow. Schiermacher has, through research in Denmark, pointed out that the longer one is homeless, the more severe the social problems become (Schiermacher, 2018; Schiermacher and Arnfjord, 2021). This is confirmed in the classical homeless research (Anderson, 1923; Harper, 1982).

Colonial Welfare Fosters Individualisation

Individualisation is one of the main alienating factors of industrialisation and colonisation (Harvey, 2010; Seeman, 1959). The reification of work and the exchange in the form of a monetary economy resulted in a reduction of traditional Inuit understanding of collectivism. Collectivism still prevails, but it is located in family circles; although some are wide and expansive, there are also family circles that are small and porous. Kalaallit Nunaat's welfare system can easily be viewed as two distinct systems. The public system, in the form of legislation and a rights-based approach, offers services the citizen can expect to receive if seeking them out. Then there is a civil societal welfare system. The welfare system is, in general, social democratic and has inherited individualising aspects. This occurs when a person, and not their social group or family, gets a case file number assigned to their individual social security number. If the person seeks therapeutic help, a psychotherapist is available, and the person then receives individual therapy. The person is led to believe that the smallest entity is them: the individual and not the group. The group is shielded through acts of anonymity and confidentiality clauses, which forbid the sharing of the individual's case with anybody not 'assigned' to their case. It also begins in the early classes of schooling, where the teaching mantra now is that the child shares responsibility *for their own learning* (Grønlands Selvstyre, 2023).

In relation to this and quoting Durkheim, Habermas (1984) writes: "… increasing individuation and growing autonomy of the individual are characteristic of a new form of solidarity that is no longer secured by prior value consensus but has to be cooperatively achieved by virtue of individual efforts" (p.84). Colonisation of a lifeworld or the 'introduction' of Western bureaucratic systems has a damaging effect on a society's former cohesive principles. What could have, and would have, been dealt with in a family setting was a housing crisis—similar to the above-mentioned culture of rural homelessness. Yet, in an effort to create transparency and treat everyone the same, there is an equal risk of lowering the service level to a point that people in real need will become very ill and 'clientised' (Mik-Meyer, 2013) When they encounter the public system, the richer middle class has the buying power to seek therapeutic help and privatised alcohol treatment, and to read up on couples therapy techniques. When their kids grow up, they are equipped with educational resources to get jobs through the job-housing programme, or long-term savings ensures a down payment on an apartment, thus creating more division. The systemic colonisation of the collective lifeworld has become an area of independent individualism for a prospering middle class and a dependent clientisation for the lesser-educated class.

When homeless researchers shine a light on this social problem, it closely resembles activism toward a more egalitarian society. It is through constant attention and eventually political attention that changes start to happen. It is furthering Freire's idea of breaking down a culture of silence. (Freire, 2005). A core motivation for our activist and involved approach in Kalaallit Nunaat was to engage with the field and alert politicians to respond more quickly to social problems, new social clients, and to create awareness around housing needs and poverty. Similar situations might be found among Arctic, European, and island communities, with limited professional capacity and limited political attention (Christensen et al., 2024).

An Activistic Approach to Homeless Research

Our approach to homelessness has a Marxian-Feuerbach angle. Among activist researchers, there is a famous Marx quote, which is also found on the stairs of the Freie Universität in Berlin: 'Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kömmt darauf an, sie zu verändern.'[2] By itself, the quote is rather dogmatic. Change it, how? It is entirely open. We have fused this with modern Marxist class analysis, focusing not particularly on class itself, but on the apparent inequality between classes that is still growing in Kalaallit Nunaat, where, for lack of a better tool, the GINI coefficient has averaged 35 for the past 10 years (Greenland Statistics, 2024); whereas for EU it has been 30 (Eurostat, 2024). We have maintained a focus that resembles Wright's reflections below:

> Different ways of analysing class can all potentially contribute to a fuller understanding by identifying different causal processes at work in shaping the micro- and macro-aspects of inequality in capitalist societies. (Wright, 2009, p.101)

To some degree, we continue to conduct class analysis to look for ways to counter class division. We work with a myriad of problems whose particularities can't be reduced to the consequences of colonialism or capitalism. This is a complex approach to class and society in an attempt to avoid mono-causal explanations for social problems.

This resembles Bradshaw's (2012) discussions about the difficulty for social policy researchers to remain neutral toward injustice. We engage with all levels of decision-makers and the community of people experiencing homelessness. The latter demands constant awareness around whether we, as researchers, still have a mandate to speak on behalf of people experiencing homelessness. We keep getting assurances that we are recognised by them to speak about the issues in this environment. The moment we don't, when people from the homeless community start

2. "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." (Marx, 1845, p.3)

voicing concern about our approach or our analysis, then we need to rethink our approach. Part of the activism is through engagement with Kofoeds Skole and The Salvation Army, where we conduct homeless fora. In the fora we discuss topics such as general service levels, the situations in the shelters, winter living, and so on. Through the forum, the participants are given space to voice their opinions and are listened to by people who take them seriously.

Data, PIT, and Soup

We have conducted fieldwork through NoIni's soup kitchen (which I take part in operating). Research in the soup kitchen is first and foremost activism by providing comfort and a meal. We haven't conducted a single structured interview in the kitchen for 10 years. It's mainly participatory observation and informal talks about the guest's homeless situation. We have also followed the municipal street team in Nuuk, researched the social-political history of Nuuk's first shelter, and spoken at length with service providers and politicians. In 2022, we conducted the first homeless count (Arnfjord and Perry, 2022). It was conducted as a point-in-time (PIT) count. Some countries spend a particular week, but because of a small team and the geography of the world's biggest island, we chose all of April as a month of counting. We used a data sheet, visited every shelter in person, travelled to all larger towns, and were in contact with social workers assisting us with the few remaining smaller towns. We did not visit smaller settlements. In addition, we conducted night runs in Nuuk, Qaqortoq, and Sisimiut in order to count street-based sleeping. We covered invisible homelessness or what others refer to as hidden homelessness (Lohmann, 2021; Wilkins, 2018). This was done through our network of social worker and NGOs and their know-how of couch surfers, and in the cases where it was possible, we collaborated with local authorities who had lists of citizens without a fixed address. The PIT count was backed and funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

We had research teams all around Kalaallit Nunaat and were in contact with both Qaanaaq (Thule) in the northwest and Ittoqqortoormiit in the northeast; these are some of the most peripheral towns in the country, and we travelled far and wide to uncover homelessness on a quantifiable level. We were also able to document the longevity of some people's situations, their gender, and age. Around 1% of the population is homeless. The absolute number was 491 out of 56 000. That is 100 times the level in Denmark; 5 989 out of 5,8 million (Benjaminsen, 2024). The PIT count was mandated before there was a public definition of homelessness. In order to know what we were counting; we had to create a definition of the research object that was ultimately accepted by the Ministry of Social Affairs as a public definition of homelessness. This, to us, was a bigger accomplishment than the count itself because an official definition paves the way for further social and political work, such as legislation, help to prevent further homelessness, and protecting people already within the

perimeter of the definition by setting up services to get them out of a homeless situation, and creating transitional housing, exit programmes, and Housing First initiatives. The full definition of homelessness includes variations of homelessness like visible, hidden, at-risk, and functional homelessness (Departementet for and Sociale Anliggender, Arbejdsmarked og Indenrigsanliggender, 2023).

The complexity lies in breaking away from that habit and facilitating empowered ways of securing a holistic and humanistic understanding for people on the margins. My approach to criticism has been a neo-Marxist approach adopted from the late Erik Olin Wright, who talked about rupture and transformation (Wright, 2006). Instead of breaking down the system, following classical Marxism, critical theory, or a Foucauldian deconstructionist approach, which might leave arguments in the gutter, I try to set up cooperations with the system. This is found in the approaches of both Wright and Kurt Lewin, the organisational psychologist who focused on the effort to reflect, act, and reflect. He supposedly said, "If you want truly to understand something, try to change it." (Tolman et al., 1996, p.31). It's the fusion of classical Marxism, with Lewin and Wright's ideas, that together inform me of arguments around the legitimacy of change. This goes against Weber's rather conservative approach to what a social scientist could or should do and underlines a legitimacy.

Data is only relevant if it facilitates change

Nuuk and the society in general are small, so a large unfolding of criticism runs the risk of speaking to deaf ears. Said differently, sociological criticism needs a response because real criticism must engage in a dialogue to succeed in bringing about real change. Criticism is important to counter the culture of a bureaucratic rational instrumental system, which easily leads to conformity. The research has, in this instance, focused on documented transformation or change for the benefit of people who are homeless. The research project has documented significant qualitative findings about the differences between women's and men's strategies when they are homeless. Men focus on housing and employment, the two elements to which they need access in order to gain a new footing in life. The women primarily talk about safety and security as the main categories (Arnfjord and Christensen, 2024).

During our prolonged fieldwork, we have been establishing trust and are now viewed as persons of reference when engaging with decision-makers. We can give continual witness to the process from 2014 until now. In this period of change, all managerial positions in NGOs and the municipal setting have been rotated. We can testify to the changes within the environment and collectively facilitate a voice and give testament. From our point of view, research into homelessness is all about significant change. If there is no noticeable change, the data loses value. It only has value if it facilitates change. This may be a radical thought, but it has to do with the particularity of this data. It isn't just data; these are life experiences, as is most

qualitative data, but in a small environment like ours, data is sensitive. The story is sensitive, as its narrative, the telling and the retelling, run the risk of retraumatising people. If people eventually deem a researcher worthy of hearing their story, there is an expectation that this should be taken seriously.

With the homeless count, we wanted to supply the administrative bureaucrats with numbers, and we viewed the process as something that would be beneficial in the long run. It would help to speed the process along. It was, from a standpoint of activist research, more important than the quantifiable data. Data is not in itself research before the data yields transformative processes. All legislation is important if it helps and protects. It should ultimately empower people to live independent lives. For instance, legislation such as an act that prohibits peddling, panhandling, or begging, or the Danish act against illegal encampments, criminalises criminalising homelessness instead of preventing it from occurring.

Toward Change in Homeless Policies

In conversations with researchers within the homeless field, it's not unusual to encounter a sigh during reflective thought, and you hear the last half of an inner dialogue saying: "… well, we know what is needed, so why does the system not just provide the housing and the social and emotional support?" The complexity may be boiled down to an instrumental rational solution, but it is also a treatment of the symptoms and not a measure that prevents homelessness to begin with. I have yet to read a unified statement of one cause of homelessness, especially when considering the Arctic. Preventing youth homelessness could most surely advance with an effort to supply young people with housing when they reach adulthood, and further, enough of such housing. The homelessness that affects middle-aged men might be due to the death of a loved one, which causes a downward spiral because the individual holds the loss internally and doesn't reach out. It might also be due to the lack of an environment of support in civil society, with which a public system has little to do. It is hard to prevent unknown circumstances. It is the known unknown; the known being the young people in public care institutions, the young who are not seeking further education or employment; those we know of and those we can plan for.

If we listen to those in the homeless environment, they point to many sound solutions. These include creating housing for the elderly (who make up 17% of the group of people experiencing homelessness) and providing safe housing and support (which comprises nearly 25% of a young group). We run the risk of prioritising one group over another, but at the same time, we could create a better solution where public officials enhance their focus on the young, the elderly, and

the large middle group of typically sheltered men. These groups could then be worked with and differentiated further with the purpose of setting up safe spaces and processes that motivate and gently push individuals into independent housing situations or a care setting that is supportive.

Such differentiation would, in Kalaallit Nunaat, create new areas of unknowns; these are again known unknowns, including the motivation for members of individual groups. What if there are universal parameters for the young, the elderly, women, and men? Differentiating between ages is not necessarily a solution that would fit all, as there will always be cases that will teach us how we can increase the humanistic approach. So, we don't split up friends and intimate partners who support each other across gender and age groups.

In 2024, we set up free courses aimed at shelter employees and street-level social workers. This is based on the analysis that very few support staff have relevant professional training. Attendance was free, and the first full course was a success with positive feedback. The second instalment in 2025 is now fully booked. We will continue to be active when it comes to housing solutions and a more humane approach to citizens. It is important that the systems remain aware that these are citizens with political rights. It is not a crime to be poor and homeless. People should have the right to receive the appropriate level of support that enables them to live an independent life.

In conclusion, we have dared to stick our necks out and openly worked on homelessness research from a social justice angle. We might have been lucky to hit a vein of political willingness to improve social conditions. We are researching within a field with some political attention, and thus the research might have been received entirely differently with potential right-wing claims of politically oriented and normative research. However, the research, from an activist research perspective, has resulted in the first step of political action in the form of a public definition of homelessness and a strategy, that focus on protection, real professional help, and it mentions the Housing First approach (Departementet for and Sociale Anliggender, Arbejdsmarked og Indenrigsanliggender, 2023). We still have a long road ahead in securing real security for people experiencing homelessness and ensuring basic rights, such as access to dedicated social work, basic income, housing first that works, and the basic right to affordable housing.

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Punitive Populism in Practice: The Criminalisation of Homelessness in Hungary

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Abstract_ *The criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary took a significant turn in 2010 with the introduction of the offence of using a public space as a habitual dwelling, better known as the criminalisation of street-based sleeping. This paper, after presenting the current legislation, will introduce the theoretical background of the criminalisation of homelessness, namely social exclusion, exclusive criminal policy, and punitive populism. It is argued that the offence of criminalising homelessness is not only the result of a severe criminal policy, but also a manifestation of punitive populism. The second half of the paper examines the practice that has developed since 2018, using statistical data and fieldwork. The tables show that although since 2018 it is illegal to use a public space as a habitual dwelling in the whole territory of Hungary, the authorities apply this offence only on seldom occasions. Using fieldwork, interviews were conducted with police officers and social care workers, mapping the exact process of the procedure, looking for reasons why the offence is rarely applied, and the causes for the spikes in the number of procedures in certain periods.*

Keywords_ *homelessness, criminalisation, Hungary, punitive populism*

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Introduction: Criminalisation of Homelessness in Hungary

In Hungary, the criminalisation of homelessness[1] became a significant concern in December 2010, when a public order regulation was changed and residing in public places became a criminal offence. The regulation was later implemented into the Act on Offences, which has been adopted in the meantime (Act on Offences, 2012). The Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsman) has initiated an *a posteriori* review challenging the provision in front of the Constitutional Court. The Commissioner argued that the purpose of the regulation is not to protect public order but to force people experiencing homelessness to use social services, which violates the right to human dignity enshrined in the Hungarian Constitution, the Fundamental Law of 2012. In 2012, the Constitutional Court ruled that the legislation was unconstitutional and annulled the law in its decision 38/2012. (XI. 14.)(38/2012. (XI.14.), 2012).[2]

The legislator subsequently amended the Constitution to pre-empt another decision of the Constitutional Court condemning the criminalisation of homelessness. According to the Fourth Amendment to the Fundamental Law amendment introduced in 2013, a new Article XXII (3) of the Fundamental Law stated that a local authority may, *in the interests of public order, public safety, public health and the protection of cultural values, declare unlawful using a public space as a habitual dwelling in respect of a specific part of public space*. Overwriting decision 38/2012. (XI. 14.) of the Constitutional Court[3], as of 15 October 2013, according to the amendment of the law, *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* has again become punishable by a fine (Act on Offences Section 179/A.) According to the legislation, non-payment of the fine was to be converted into a detention. Therefore, between 2013 and 2018, if a person experiencing homelessness "committed" the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, they had to pay a fine to avoid detention.

Five years later, in 2018, the Fundamental Law was amended again and *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* has become uniformly prohibited everywhere in Hungary. In accordance with the 2018 amendment to the Fundamental Law, Section 178/B of the Act on Offences defines the offence of *using a public space*

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1 In this paper, the author uses the term criminalisation of homelessness in its narrowest sense, to refer to the criminalisation of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, *'életvitelszerű közterületen tartózkodás'* in Hungarian.

2 For a detailed analysis on the Constitutional Court's decision, see the study of Attila Lápossy and István Ambrus. (Lápossy and Ambrus, 2021).

3 It is not unprecedented in post-2010 Hungarian legislation to amend laws, even the Fundamental Law, for political purposes. This phenomenon has been addressed in depth by several authors in recent years (Halmai, 2018; Drinóczi and Bień-Kacała, 2019; Kazai, 2019).

as a habitual dwelling. A number of judges filed motions to the Constitutional Court challenging the legislation. The Constitutional Court examined the issue again in 2019, but in its decision of 19/2019. (VI. 18.) it did not annul the provision. At the same time, it established, as a constitutional requirement, that the sanction for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* could be lawfully applied if the person who is experiencing homelessness' placement in the social service system was verifiably guaranteed at the time of the offence (19/2019. (VI.18.), 2019). The Constitutional Court in 2019 decided on almost identical legislation as in 2012, but came to a different outcome. There are some possible explanations for this, such as the change to the Fundamental Law and the change in the composition of the Constitutional Court. This judgement is the subject of intense criticism and raises significant questions about the political loyalty of the Constitutional Court to the governing party (Chronowski and Halmai, 2019).

Since 2018, imposing a fine is not possible anymore, but using a public space as a habitual dwelling is punishable by detention or community service. The regulation states that, within 90 days, the police may issue a warning for the first three offenses. On the fourth occasion, it is mandatory for the police to start an offence procedure.

It is also important to note that the definition of a habitual dweller is vaguely defined in Section 178/B. paragraph (5). According to this provision, "use as a habitual dwelling shall be construed to mean all behaviours on the basis of which it can be established that the public space is used as a dwelling for long-term stay **without the intention of returning** to any domicile, place of residence or other accommodation and the circumstances of the use of the public space or the **behaviour suggest** that the activity generally carried out in the public space used as domicile, including, in particular, sleeping, bathing, eating and animal keeping, is carried out recurrently at **short intervals** and regularly in the public space by the perpetrator"(emphasis added by the author). Some parts of this definition are ambiguous: there is no further explanation of how the authorities decide on the habitual dwellers intention of returning to any domicile, no further description of how a behaviour can suggest that the activities mentioned are generally carried out in a public place, and it is also unclear how long a "short interval" can last.

The provision does not describe the detailed procedure of the police, but the exact process is being governed by an internal police instruction which is not available to the public. No comprehensive research on the application of the law has been carried out since 2018. This paper is about the criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary. After presenting the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, the criminological context is introduced. Following this is an examination of the

application of the offence through statistical data and fieldwork interviews. A description of the methodology in more detail follows at the beginning of the section on empirical research.

This paper will first introduce the theoretical background of the criminalisation of homelessness and then use statistical data analysis and field research to examine the application of the law.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this article presents social exclusion and punitive populism. However, it is important to refer to previous debates that have appeared in the *European Journal of Homelessness*, which have discussed different aspects of the criminalisation of homelessness. O'Sullivan (2012) argues that European states are increasingly managing homelessness through punitive measures—such as anti-begging laws and restrictions on public space usage—reflecting a broader policy shift toward exclusion and control rather than social inclusion. This analysis is complemented and expanded by several international contributions in Volume 7 of 2013, which demonstrate how similar dynamics play out across different contexts. Gaetz (2013), drawing on Canadian data, shows how punitive responses push individuals experiencing homelessness deeper into the justice system, reinforcing marginalisation, while Sylvestre (2013) emphasises that such measures are often rooted in neoliberal political agendas that prioritise regulation and surveillance over social support. Dyb (2013) discusses the Nordic welfare states, showing that even in these traditionally supportive environments, there is a noticeable drift toward punitive policy. Doherty (2013) contributes a spatial perspective, arguing that the governance of public space is central to the criminalisation of homelessness, with urban authorities aiming to render poverty invisible in cityscapes, while Mahs' (2013) article examines the intersection of punitive measures and welfare state interventions concerning homelessness. The studies illustrate a cross-national trend of instead of responding to homelessness as a complex social issue, governments increasingly treat it as a matter of public order, resorting to criminal law and exclusionary urban policies that deepen social marginalisation.

Social exclusion

The phenomenon of homelessness cannot be understood without exploring the notion of social exclusion, and therefore any solution to the problem of homelessness requires a complex approach to the problem. To this day, there is no consensus on what the exact definition of homelessness is, although it can play an important role both in defining who is included in the group and in policy decisions (Pik, 1995). There are several interpretations, the most common of which defines homelessness

in relation to housing, the lack of it, and the factors that determine the quality of the housing. Some interpretations, on the other hand, focus on personality, psychological components, lack of relationships, lack of homeliness, and adult or childhood traumas. Other interpretations describe homelessness as a complex life situation caused by social exclusion, marginalisation, and loss of existence (Győri, 2020). The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) is a European NGO with the aim of eradicating the phenomenon of homelessness. It was founded in 1989 and brings together more than 130 member organisations from 27 Member States. FEANTSA has developed the ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion) and ETHOS Light typologies, aiming to provide a common language on homelessness. ETHOS is a comprehensive framework for experts and academics and ETHOS Light is intended as a harmonised definition of homelessness for statistical purposes (FEANTSA, 2021). ETHOS divides homelessness into four categories, from the narrowest to the broadest. These are rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing, and inadequate housing.

In Hungary, homelessness became a significant and visible phenomenon after the regime change. Unemployment resulting from the loss of full employment also had a severe impact on poverty. In addition, the State radically withdrew from housing subsidies during these years: between 1989 and 1995, the share of housing subsidies in GDP fell from 8.6% to 1.8% (Misetics, 2017). To analyse housing poverty and the resulting homelessness, we need to look at the conceptualisation of homelessness and the criminological concept of social exclusion.

Ferge (2000), a Hungarian sociologist, argues that the advantage of the notion of exclusion is that it gives a direct sense that it is not only about material poverty, but also about exclusion from other sources, opportunities, actions, rights, in other words, it is a complex problem. She believes that exclusion is, in fact, a consequence of social disintegration and ultimately a dysfunction of society. According to her, social exclusion is a social phenomenon and responsibility: the excluded are excluded from society (Ferge, 2000). According to Lévay (2006), exclusion is a dynamic, multifaceted process in which those affected are completely or partially excluded from the social, economic, political, or cultural opportunities, organisations, and institutions that serve social integration. Lévay (2006) also sees it as a social phenomenon based on growing inequality and insecurity. Bradley (2013) defines social exclusion as a dynamic process characterised by marginalisation, social isolation, dislocation, disconnection, and vulnerability. From each of these definitions of exclusion, we can see that exclusion should be seen as a complex process, composed of several factors and based on growing inequalities.

Exclusive criminal policy

Criminal policy is broadly defined as the set of objectives and tasks undertaken by the State to deal with crime, offenders, and other crime-related phenomena, and the design and operation of institutions to deal with them. The term refers to both the knowledge base and the policy. In late modern criminal policy, we can distinguish between exclusive and inclusive models. The two models are almost nowhere to be found in their pure form, but rather at the two ends of a scale, with criminal policies tending to resemble one or the other (Borbíró, 2016). While the basic principle of inclusive criminal policy is inclusion and the social integration of problematic social groups and individuals, exclusionary criminal policy is characterised by the control and exclusion of such groups and individuals. The exclusive model is also characterised by, amongst other things, symbolic language, the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', the use of criminal law to address social problems, extensive criminalisation, active formal regulation of behaviour, and more severe penalties. The impact of exclusive criminal policy is also reflected in social policy, as the role of social policy varies depending on what activities are criminalised by the legislator, in what circumstances, and how. Exclusive criminal policy narrows the scope for social policy in favour of punishment and criminal law, which therefore relies more on instruments of control rather than support (Borbíró, 2016).

Punitive populism

In 2002, Gönczöl highlighted a paradigm shift in the United States, where social policy was confined within the framework of criminal policy (Gönczöl, 2002). Later, Ferge (2014) observed a similar trend, noting that the State was replacing the fight against insecurity, poverty, and growing inequality with a punitive policy. Gönczöl later encapsulated this shift as 'punitive populism', describing it as a process whereby the ruling political elite reacts to public pressure in a simplistic, spectacular, and a quick-win manner. Rather than addressing serious social conflicts in a substantive way, these elites resort to the extension of social control as a power engineering solution to gain votes (Gönczöl, 2015). Since the 1980s, the concept of punitive populism has gained traction in criminology, explaining the tendency to respond to crime and deviance not through professional social policy, but through increasingly harsh criminal policy measures. These responses often include disproportionate sentencing, the expansion of punishable acts, and the criminalisation of broader segments of the population.

Roberts et al. (2003) identify three key features of punitive populism: there is an excessive focus on how attractive certain actions are to voters; a disregard—whether intentional or negligent—for the real-world impacts of punitive policies; and reliance on oversimplified assumptions about public opinion, often derived from flawed methodologies.

There is a large overlap between the instruments of the exclusive criminal policy model and the instruments of punitive populism. However, there are two major differences between the two: the prominent role of the media and the preparation and professionalism of criminal policy. As to the first important difference, which Gönczöl (2022) highlights, populist power, through its rhetoric and the media it controls, creates new scapegoats (such as the migrants or the homeless), and constantly stirs up public anger, thereby framing public discourse. The public opinion it has inflamed naturally demands greater severity (Gönczöl, 2022).

In Hungary, where the majority of media outlets are under government control, this mechanism is particularly effective. The State uses its media dominance not only to disseminate propaganda and manipulate regulatory bodies (Nemeth, 2024), but also to dominate public discourse through tools like billboard campaigns, free pro-government publications, and 'national consultations'. These consultations frame public opinion through biased questions and reach the entire population. Social media offers some degree of pluralism, but political messages often remain confined within ideological bubbles (Polyák et al., 2022).

Referendums have also been co-opted to serve similar purposes. Rather than facilitating democratic participation, they are often initiated by the Government to reinforce its policy agenda. For example, the 2016 referendum against migration and the 2022 referendum on anti-LGBT legislation served as tools to mobilise support and focus public attention on government-defined issues. As Tóth (2022) argues, in the Hungarian context, referendums function less as instruments of democratic input, and more as tools for consolidating authoritarian governance.

The second aspect, by which the instruments of exclusive criminal policy can be distinguished from punitive populism, is the quality of the process of legislation. This is expressed, among other things, in the lack of preparation of legislation and the absence of impact assessments (Kunos, 2023). Research shows that after 2010, the public negotiations required by the legislation have largely evaporated. This has been reflected in the abolition of institutionalised consultation forums, which have been replaced by new ones. At the same time, the Government has created its own partners, with which it only formally consults (Gajduschek, 2016). It should also be noted that since 2010, the governing party coalition has held two-thirds of the seats in the Hungarian parliament almost uninterruptedly. Consequently, no support other than that of the governing party coalition is needed, even on crucial issues requiring qualified majorities. This has shortened parliamentary debates considerably, as the will of one political force can be fully exercised. Instrumentalised legislation is a general problem in Hungary, which is also a serious problem for the rule of law. Kazai (2019) examines the instrumentalisation of legislation in Hungary by analysing the flaws of the Hungarian parliamentary law-making and the wide-range of proce-

dural deficiencies. Bárd and Kazai argue that in the case of Hungary, the formal elements of the rule of law are frequently neglected as "the lack of preliminary consultations and impact assessments during lawmaking, the enactment of significant legislative reforms in accelerated procedures without any adequate justification, the adoption of ad hominem laws, or the unclarity and unpredictability of legislation are all manifest violations of the formal understanding of the rule of law" (Bárd and Kazai, 2022, p.165).

The lack of preparation of legislation, the absence of impact assessments and consultation, and the absence of substantive parliamentary debate in the area of criminal legislation are particularly problematic, as the most severe sanctions are attached to breaches of these rules.

As mentioned above, the current text of the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* was adopted in 2018. The impact assessment sheet of the offence is only one page long. The legislation was passed without the involvement of civil society organisations, and moreover, despite their protests (Szabálysértési Munkacsoport, 2018). The largest Hungarian NGO working on homelessness, Menhely Foundation, was later called upon by the Constitutional Court to express its opinion. The Foundation pointed out that the capacity of homeless services is not sufficient to accommodate people living in public spaces (Menhely Alapítvány, 2018). In the meantime, however, there have been several media reports in the captured media to justify the legislation.[4] Overall, it can be concluded that the criminalisation of homelessness is not only a textbook example of a legislation of exclusive criminal policy, but also the manifestation of punitive populism. In this case, punitive populism uses exclusive criminal policy measures as instruments, resulting in measures such as the criminalisation of homelessness.

Implementation of the legislation

Statistical analysis of the application of the law

Since the research began, requests for statistics from the police on *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* have been lodged. The latest data used for this study is until September 2024. A summary Table is prepared below showing the sanctions for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*.

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4 The captured media has sought to justify the criminalisation of homelessness on a number of occasions during the 2018 change in legislation. Hirado.hu is the online platform of public media. See e.g., : https://hirado.hu/belfold/belpolitika/cikk/2018/06/14/a-kormany-intezkedesei-a-hajlektalan-emberek-meltosagat-szolgaljak; https://hirado.hu/belfold/kozelet/cikk/2018/10/02/magyarorszag-kiemelt-figyelmet-fordit-a-hajlektalanokra; https://hirado.hu/belfold/kozelet/cikk/2018/10/14/az-ellatorendszer-jelenti-a-valodi-segitseget-a-hajlektalanoknak; https://hirado.hu/belfold/kozelet/cikk/2018/10/11/fulop-a-tarsadalom-egeszet-szolgalja-a-hajlektalanokrol-szolo-jogszabaly.

Table 1: Using a public space as a habitual dwelling between October 15, 2018 and September 14, 2024

Using a public space as a habitual dwelling	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024. I.-IX.	2019-2024. IX.
On-the-spot warnings	345	243	210	174	182	394	1548
Number of prosecutions	5	3	2	4	6	9	29
Detentions							
Number of detentions	0	0	0	0	2	3	5
Total length of detentions (day)	0	0	0	0	30	25	55
Community services							
Number of community service penalties applied	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
Total extent of community services applied (hours)	49	0	0	50	0	28	127

As the Table shows, the police only rarely initiate an offence procedure for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, and it is even rarer for it to result in a sanction. The number of on-the-spot warnings issued is much higher, therefore monthly data on warnings issued were requested to see at which time of the year the number of warnings increases, which are summarised in the Table below.

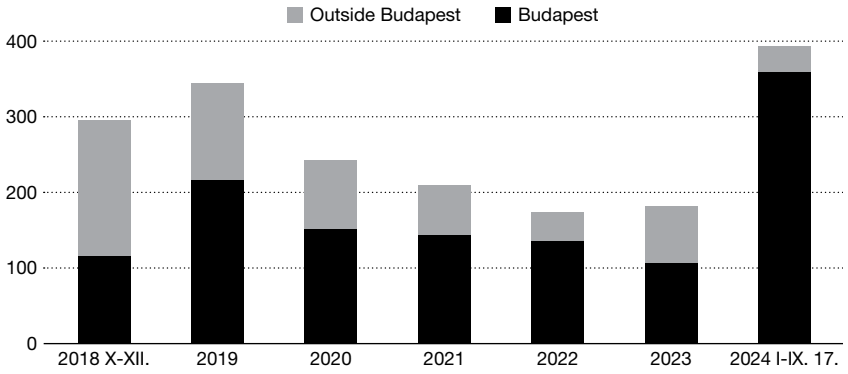
Table 2: On-the-spot warnings for using a public space as a habitual dwelling between October 15, 2018 and September 17, 2024

On-the-spot warnings for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* (2018. 10. 15. – 2024. 09. 17.)

Year / Month	*number of on-the-spot warnings*											
	I.	*II.*	*III.*	*IV.*	*V.*	*VI.*	*VII.*	*VIII.*	*IX.*	*X.*	*XI.*	*XII.*
2018										*218*	*63*	*15*
2019	*22*	*18*	*14*	*10*	*16*	*7*	*90*	*33*	*54*	*30*	*28*	*23*
2020	*9*	*10*	*15*	*9*	*2*	*7*	*26*	*15*	*37*	*90*	*21*	*2*
2021	*10*	*8*	*6*	*3*	*9*	*8*	*46*	*53*	*10*	*17*	*21*	*19*
2022	*11*	*12*	*9*	*5*	*27*	*13*	*11*	*10*	*45*	*20*	*10*	*1*
2023	*6*	*6*	*2*	*4*	*16*	*5*	*10*	*10*	*25*	*21*	*42*	*35*
2024	*48*	*79*	*88*	*44*	*36*	*20*	*26*	*23*	*30*			

The number of warnings issued by area distribution were also reviewed. The data is summarised by the number of warnings issued for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* in Budapest and the number of warnings issued outside Budapest (Figure 1). It is clear from the statistics that the police only rarely initiate a proceeding for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*. After the entry into force of the current legislation, in the Autumn and Winter 2018, the number of cases was high for a short period. However, in nearly six years since then, the offence has been used very rarely. Detention and community service sanctions were imposed even less frequently (see Table 1).

Figure1: Using a public space as a habitual dwelling in and outside Budapest



The 2018 data are less relevant for the analysis of the application of the law, given the constitutional requirements of the 2019 Constitutional Court decision. In October 2018, a significantly higher number of warnings (218 cases), and the highest number of offence proceedings initiated (7 cases), were observed compared to later years. However, from 2019, the constitutional requirement of the Constitutional Court came into force, according to which offence proceedings can only be initiated if the person's place in the social care system was ensured at the time of the offence. Consequently, the subsequent analysis focuses on data from 2019-2024.

The number of on-the-spot warnings increased between July and September 2019, with a peak in July 2019, and then again between November 2023 to March 2024, with peaks in February and March (see Table 2). There is another peak in October 2020. The number of offence procedures remained persistently low.

The data series shows that from 2019 onward, each year, most warnings were issued in Budapest (see Figure 1). Taking into account that, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics' data, Budapest's population share in relation to the national one ranged between 17.5-18% in the period under review, the number of proceedings in Budapest is extremely high (KSH, 2024).

There are no accurate figures on how many people experiencing homelessness live in Hungary, nor on how many spend their nights in public spaces. The February Third Working Group conducts a survey of people experiencing homelessness every year. However, this is a qualitative survey conducted on a single day of the year, making it difficult to estimate the total number of people experiencing homelessness. For the 2023 survey, a total of 7 268 people experiencing homelessness provided evaluable responses, of whom 1 530 lived in public spaces ("2023. évi Gyorsjelentés a Február Harmadika Munkacsoport éves adatfelvételéről"). In October 2024, with the help of volunteers, the Shelter Foundation sought to gather information on the number and conditions of people experiencing homelessness. In the October 2024 survey, 461 people were recorded only in the centre of Budapest, as well as 31 empty sites that were apparently used as sleeping places for people without shelter ("Minden ember számít!" – Budapesti hajléktalan "népszámlálás" 2024 októberében").

Methodology of the Empirical Examination

To explore how the dynamics of punitive populism and exclusive criminal policy manifest in practice, I conducted interviews with key actors involved in the procedure. These interviews provide empirical insight into how political narratives, media influence, and institutional practices shape everyday decision-making and professional attitudes within the system, by showing how the application of using a public space as a habitual dwelling works in practice. By linking the theoretical framework to firsthand experiences, the analysis helps reveal how punitive and exclusionary approaches influence the everyday workings of the criminal justice system.

Based on the analysis of statistics, several research questions were identified. This research focuses on two main issues. Firstly, the justification for the low number of cases for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* compared to visible street-based sleeping. As part of this, it was also the intention to find out what explains the increase in the number of warnings and procedures in a given period. Information was also needed on how the procedure is implemented in practice and on the protocol used by the police to decide whether to initiate an offence proceeding.

The second research question concerns the impact of criminalisation. In this context, there was interest in the effectiveness of the use of the offence to tackle homelessness, and how and in what proportion control and support are present in the established practice. In order to do this, the cooperation between the police and the social care system specialised for people experiencing homelessness was

examined. In addition, it was intended to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of homelessness in public spaces and to explore the reasons for choosing or refusing the homeless care system.

The fieldwork was based on the public interest data on *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* described above. Since the local distribution of the procedures seemed to be predominantly in Budapest, the examination was limited to Budapest.

The research questions were approached from two directions. It was intended to answer questions about law enforcement through interviews with police officers and fieldwork in social care. With permission, the researcher recorded 8 semi-structured interviews with police officers. In addition, the researcher interviewed the head of the street service of a social care institution, and then took part in two-night visits to the area with the social workers of the institution, together with the officers of the local public area surveillance. All the interviews (both the police and the social sphere ones) were semi-structured interviews. The point of these interviews was to understand the application of the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*.

Police interviews

During the fieldwork, semi-structured interviews with police officers were conducted. The researcher was able to interview eight professionals who were involved in the practice of the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* and who had different perspectives on its application. For this reason, the interviewees included specialists in administration and law enforcement management, senior police officers in the public order department, a staff commander in charge of patrols, and patrol officers.

As the purpose of these interviews was to better understand the application of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, the questions asked aimed to find out what the procedure itself looks like, how long some procedural elements take, and whether there is a protocol for when a warning is applied. There was also interest in knowing what the cooperation between the police and the social sector looks like from the police perspective. The interviewees were asked if they had experience of such procedures and what they experienced in terms of whether the

proceedings were initiated more on formal detection or on citizen notification in order to understand if there is an incentive to enforce the offence and under what conditions other means (e.g., security measures) are used.[5]

Data collection in street outreach services

The aim of the interviews was to find out what factors in their practical experience led people experiencing homelessness to choose homeless social care and what their experience is of the application of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*. For this purpose, a social service institution was contacted, where the head of the street social workers was interviewed and the researcher was able to participate in two-night visits with the street social service and the public area surveillance. The joint night-time visits of the street social services and the public area surveillance were piloted in the summer of 2024, with two social workers and two officers of the public area surveillances working together on one visit. This gave the researcher the opportunity to talk to all four staff members of the street service and observe their work.[6]

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5 The interviews were based on the following questions:

1. *What is the procedure to be followed by the police officer when initiating an offence procedure for using a public space as a habitual dwelling? How long does it take to initiate the offence procedure and how long is the procedure itself?*
2. *Is there a uniform internal protocol on the cases in which the police initiate proceedings for using a public space as a habitual dwelling? If so, what is the substance of the protocol? If not, what criteria does the police officer apply in deciding whether to initiate proceedings or to issue a warning?*
3. *What criteria does the police officer take into account when repeating warnings? At what intervals does the police officer issue warnings?*
4. *Is there regular cooperation between the police and the relevant social partners? If so, please provide details.*
5. *How often do you take action on the grounds of using a public space as a habitual dwelling? Are these measures typically taken on the basis of own observations, complaints or referrals?*
6. *How is the initiation of offence proceedings for using a public space as a habitual dwelling reflected in the police performance evaluation?*
7. *When does the police apply security measures? Is the security measure reflected in the police performance evaluation?*
8. *Is it possible to take someone to a homeless shelter as a coercive measure?*

6 The rules for the operation of the street service are laid down in the *SZCSM (Ministry of Social and Family Affairs)* Decree 1/2000 (I. 7.) on the duties of social institutions providing personal care and the conditions of their operation. In Budapest, there are 37 street services specialised for people experiencing homelessness, which are connected by Menhely Foundation's Dispatching Service. The Dispatching Service establishes contracts with the street services. Four street services are operated by the social service institution I have researched.

In these interviews, the goal was to learn about the experiences of social workers, find out what their experiences of using homeless services are, and to understand from the social workers' side how the social sector and the police work together and how they see the application of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* from the social sector's side.[7]

Examination of the public area surveillance authorities

In Hungary, municipalities may establish public area surveillances. These bodies are governed by Act LXIII of 1999 on public area surveillances. Public area surveillances are responsible for the public order and cleanliness, including controlling parking vehicles, the maintenance of public transport facilities, and the protection of municipal property. Public area surveillances employ inspectors. These inspectors have powers such as imposing fines for several offences. The Act on Offences specifies the cases in which the inspectors have powers. They have no powers to handle the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, but they can impose fines for activities such as begging or sanitation offences.

Initially, it was not intended to conduct any research regarding the public area surveillances, but both the police and the social workers suggested that examining the public area surveillances is necessary for understanding how authorities handle homelessness. Public data from the public area surveillances of Budapest's inner districts was requested, and, where available, their reports concerning homelessness have been analysed.

Conclusions Based on the Research

The reasons for the low number of proceedings

As seen in Table 1, there are only a few proceedings regarding *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*. During fieldwork, the researcher attempted to find the reasons behind this phenomenon. There are at least six reasons why the level of low enforcement is low, summarised below.

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7 The interview questions were:

1. In your experience, what are the typical reasons, situations, or forms in which homeless individuals choose to engage with the homeless care system, or conversely, opt not to use it?
2. In your practice, have any persons entered the care system due to the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling?*
3. *Do you have regular contact with the local police authority? If so, could you please describe the nature of this interaction. If not, do you consider such contact necessary, and for what reasons?*
4. *Please provide any other information you consider relevant to this subject.*

1. *Security measures*

If a person experiencing homelessness has a health problem, the police will use security measures.[8] In this case, no offence will be prosecuted and the police officer in charge will call an ambulance. It is also called a security measure if a person living in a public place is taken by the police to a shelter for the homeless ('appropriate social institution'). In this case, a specific crisis car run by the police used for this purpose will transport the person experiencing homelessness to the social institution.

2. *The wording of the regulation*

Section 178/B. paragraph (5) of the offence elaborates on the definition of a habitual dweller. Police say that this definition is the main obstacle to the procedures. According to Section 178/B. paragraph (5) "use as a habitual dwelling shall be construed to mean all behaviours on the basis of which it can be established that the public space is used as a dwelling for long-term stay without the intention of returning to any domicile, place of residence or other accommodation and the circumstances of the use of the public space or the behaviour suggest that the activity generally carried out in the public space used as domicile, including, in particular, sleeping, bathing, eating and animal keeping, is carried out recurrently at short intervals and regularly in the public space by the perpetrator." Part of the definition states that a habitual dweller is someone who has no intention of returning to any domicile. According to the police, this cannot be established in many cases. A lot of people living on the streets have an address, and when asked, they often state that they have an intention to return to their domicile. Another part of the definition relates to the circumstances of a habitual dweller. Based on the examination of the circumstances, habitual dwelling cannot be established since there are many people experiencing homelessness with only a few belongings, which they carry with themselves. The experience from within this research, however, is that the textualist interpretation of the law is more likely to be based on structural problems of the application of the regulation explained below.

3. *Unsuccessful court proceedings*

As shown in Table 1, there are only a few offence proceedings, but there are even less cases where the court imposes a penalty. The interviewees at the police stated that they feel that the criminalisation of homelessness is not supported by the criminal court. This claim can be supported by the fact that until September 2024, the criminal court had imposed detention in only five cases and community service in three cases, meaning that in the first nearly six years of application of the provision, the court had imposed substantive sanctions in a total of eight cases. In

8 See: Act XXXIV. of 1994 on the Police, Section 37.

her study, Molnár (2024) analyses the 2018-2019 court decisions on *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* from the perspective of judicial strategies. She finds that in cases of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, the 'compromising court' strategy has become the most widely used, meaning that the court does not confront the legislator, but does not neglect fundamental rights. Consequently, decisions are taken in a formalistic way, but within a dogmatic framework without applying sanctions (Molnár, 2024). She points out that this is presumably one of the consequences of the Constitutional Court's decision of 19/2019. (VI.18.), according to which *"According to Article 28 of the Fundamental Law, in the course of the application of law, courts shall interpret the text of laws primarily in accordance with their purpose and with the Fundamental Law. In the interpretation of the Fundamental Law and of the laws one should assume that they serve a moral and economic purpose, which is in line with common sense and the public good. Interpretation in accordance with Article 28 of the Fundamental Law is a constitutional obligation for the proceeding courts. In the case under review, the challenged text of the norm provides the law-applying organs with a possibility of flexible assessment to determine the conducts qualified as "habitual". It should be furthermore emphasized that washing oneself on public ground, in itself, does not form part of properly using the public ground in line with its purpose. However, the elaboration of this framework of interpretation is the duty of the adjudicating courts."*. (Constitutional Court's decision 19/2019. (VI.18.), [80]). In other words, the Constitutional Court did not annul the offence, but drew the attention of the courts to the fact that the text of the provision allows for a flexible interpretation and that the courts must apply the law in accordance with the Fundamental Law.

4. *Administrative burden*

The police interviewees stated that if the police carry out the proceeding step-by-step, the entire proceeding lasts for 6-8 hours, which is a significant administrative burden.

5. *The procedure is not effective*

A social problem cannot be solved by policing. The interviewees also referred to the fact that, even though the application of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* is an extraordinary workload for the police, it is also spectacularly inefficient. For the police, it is visible that even if an offence proceeding is 'successful' in a sense that it is sanctioned by the court, the person who 'commits' *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* is soon to be on the streets again.

6. *It is easier to initiate proceedings for other activities*

In many cases, activities related to homelessness are much easier to sanction than *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*. Activities such as begging or sanitary offences are often linked to homelessness.[9] It should be stressed that a significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness do not commit any of these offences, and in many cases, the offenders are not homeless. However, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that when another offence is committed, it is easier to take an action because of that than *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*.

Table 3 shows the sanctions imposed for begging, in which the offender is "a person who engages in begging in a public space or public place imploring passers-by or persons in the public place to hand over money" (Act on Offences, 2012). As shown, the offence is typically punished with an on-the-spot fine or a (regular) fine, depending on whether the procedure reaches the court stage. The proportion of fines paid by offenders was also examined, showing that less than 1% of the on-the-spot fines were paid in this period. The proportion of (regular) fines paid is more favourable, but still below 10% in each year. This is important because unpaid fines are converted into detention, or upon request, community service.

Table 3: Begging in a public space or public place imploring passers-by or persons in the public place to hand over money – sanctions imposed between 2019-2024. IX.

Begging in a public space or public place imploring passers-by or persons in the public place to hand over money [Offences Act Section 185 Paragraph (2) first part]	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024. I.-IX.**	**2019-2024. IX.**
On-the-spot fines							
Number of on-the-spot fines	1974	2809	3144	2351	2898	2631	15807
Payment rate	**0,91%**	**0,45%**	**0,41%**	**0,51%**	**0,36%**	**1,37%**	**0,67%**
Fines							
Number of fines	629	730	970	969	1064	744	5106
Payment rate	**6,02%**	**9,25%**	**8,67%**	**7,05%**	**5,36%**	**1,25%**	**6,27%**
Community services							
Number of community service sanctions	2	0	0	2	3	2	9
Cumulated amount of community service (hours)	144	0	0	154	432	120	850
Detention							
Number of detentions	1	11	13	6	5	2	38
Cumulated amount of detentions (day)	3	80	121	34	93	10	341

9 These kind of legal regulations are often considered as laws criminalising homelessness in its broader sense. See for example: (UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, 2024).

Table 4 shows the sanctions imposed for sanitation offences in total – not only in the homeless population. Section 196 Paragraph (1) point a) of the Offences Act prohibits "contaminating a public space, a building intended for public traffic or a public transport vehicle" (Act on Offences, 2012). In this case, it is worth looking at the data after 2021, when the wording of the legislation changed to its current form. Before 2021, the number of sanctions is much higher because littering was prohibited by the Offences Act. In 2021, the prohibition of littering was transferred to another law. As seen, the payment rate is higher in the case of sanitation offences than in the case of begging (Table 4), but still very low.

Table 4: Sanitation offences – contaminating a public space, a building intended for public traffic or a public transport vehicle sanctions imposed between 2019-2024. IX.

Sanitation offence – contaminating a public space, a building intended for public traffic or a public transport vehicle	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024. I.-IX.**	**2019-2024. IX.**
On-the-spot fines							
Number of on-the-spot fines	13568	15700	5889	4847	3890	3429	47323
Payment rate	**23,97%**	**22,97%**	**63,19%**	**27,96%**	**23,13%**	**12,24%**	**28,91%**
Fines							
Number of fines	2060	2855	1419	1223	1115	813	9485
Payment rate	**18,66%**	**23,98%**	**26,51%**	**27,99%**	**21,75%**	**13,04%**	**21,99%**
Community service							
Number of community service sanctions	5	3	1	0	2	0	11
Cumulated amount of community service (hours)	192	312	54	0	90	0	648
Detention							
Number of detentions	14	37	8	5	4	0	68
Cumulated amount of detentions (day)	113	244	58	55	50	0	520

The Offences Act also prohibits nuisance. According to Section 170 of the Act, "a person who displays a conspicuously anti-social conduct that is capable of causing outrage or alarm in others commits an offence" (Act on Offences, 2012). According to the interviewees, when people experiencing homelessness engage in disruptive anti-social behaviour, they are more easily prosecuted for nuisance than for using a public space as a habitual dwelling. It should be noted that nuisance may apply more easily to those whose antisocial behaviour occurs in public spaces than to those who engage in the same behaviour in a housing unit.

It is also important to note that municipalities may lay down basic rules of community coexistence by decree, which may also prohibit behaviour closely linked to homelessness. One example is the prohibition of the consumption of alcohol in public places, which is prohibited by decree in many municipalities and districts of Budapest.

Statistical data do not, of course, show the number of prosecutions of people experiencing homelessness for the above-mentioned offences, but the interviews with both the social sector and the police confirm that the authorities consider these measures easier to apply than *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*.

Reasons for the occasional increase in procedures

As the statistics show, the number of procedures increased in 2019 and 2024. According to the police interviewees, these peaks can be linked to the approaching municipal elections.[10] There are more reports during this period, and this is the reason for more prosecutions. As elections approach, municipalities pay more attention to the 'tidiness' of public spaces. It can be assumed that during this period not only the number of reports from the public increases, but also that the district police stations increase their surveillance of public spaces.[11]

In summary, the rise in numbers is linked to political will. This can happen both directly and indirectly. Directly, when there is more intense surveillance in a public place, and by that, the official observations increase. The notifications of the police can also be directly influenced, leading to more cases. Political will can also affect the number of procedures indirectly, if political communication and the media has contents against homelessness, this can lead to more citizen notifications. The police interviewees stated that they have to handle a significant number of citizen notifications, especially in residential areas. There are no data on how many procedures are initiated because of official sightings nor how many are initiated as a result of citizen notifications.

The actors in the procedure

To better understand the application of *using public space as a habitual dwelling*, field research with the actors of the procedure was conducted. There are four actors in the process of criminalisation: the person experiencing homelessness, the police, the social care, and the public area surveillance. Their cooperation and coordination with each other was subsequently examined.

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10 Municipal elections were held in Hungary in October 2019 and June 2024.

11 The municipal elections cannot explain the October 2020 increase. This may be related to the fact that it occurred between two periods of epidemic quarantine.

Public area surveillances are often the first to meet homelessness. As mentioned above, they have no powers to file a case of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling*, but they may impose on-the-spot fines for the offences such as *begging* and *sanitation offences,* and in certain cases, they may be authorised to impose sanctions regarding municipal decrees. Municipal decrees may prohibit certain activities to protect public order, and they can also lay down certain rules for coexistence. These rules can affect homelessness, such as the ones prohibiting consuming alcohol in public places. Public area surveillances are municipal police forces, therefore they are part of the municipal hierarchy. What was found during the fieldwork, which was later confirmed by the reports of the public area surveillance, is that the municipal police mainly use informal pressure to reduce homelessness in public areas in the district. Though, if a person experiencing homelessness does not commit any offences besides living on the streets, the public area surveillances would not have any powers. In practice they can only use patrols and postings to push people experiencing homelessness out of parts of the district. It varies greatly how municipal police departments handle homelessness. They have both connections with the police and the social institutions, and it depends on their approach who they notify.

Where examined, the social sector and the police had a good cooperation. Part of this cooperation is necessary, due to the decision of 19/2019. (VI.18.) of the Constitutional Court, which states that an offence procedure can only be initiated if it is proven that the person experiencing homelessness has a place in the social care. Therefore, whenever the police initiate an offence, they have to contact the dispatch service of the social care. The positive cooperation can also be justified by the fact that, as it was also revealed in my interviews with the police, the police find it ineffective to tackle the problem of homelessness by law enforcement means.

The social care system has an ongoing responsibility to try to shape institutions so that people living on the streets do not refuse to receive care, and the most important tool for this is lowering the entry threshold. According to the interviewees, the three most important aspects for people living on the streets are the safety of an institution, the predictability of its operation, and good communication between the person experiencing homelessness and the staff. The homeless care system is constantly trying to meet these expectations.

However, it is also important to note that shelters are only a temporary solution for people experiencing homelessness. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, homelessness cannot be separated from the process of social exclusion, in which people experiencing homelessness are pushed to the periphery of society.

Conclusions

This paper provides a summary of the criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary. To begin with, the legislative process in Hungary and the legislative environment that currently criminalises homelessness were presented. The theoretical background to the criminalisation of homelessness: social exclusion, exclusive criminal policy, and punitive populism, was then briefly discussed and it was argued that the criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary is not only the emergence of a strict criminal policy, but also an instrument of punitive populism.

In order to better understand the facts uncovered through an analysis of the criminal records related to using public space as a habitual dwelling, field research with key stakeholders such as the police, social workers, and public surveillance staff was conducted. Lessons show that there are several reasons causing the lack of proceedings. The large number of security measures, the wording of the regulation, the unsuccessful court proceedings, the administrative burden of a 6-8 hours long procedure, the fact that other offences can be used easier, but most importantly, its visible ineffectiveness in tackling homelessness. It should also be noted that the fact that so few prosecutions are brought for *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* also shows that we are seeing the expression of punitive populism, since the aim of the creation of the legislation was clearly not to punish the homeless in large numbers, but to enable the Government to appear as if it could solve the problem of homelessness.

The research was also interested in discovering the reasons behind the rise in the number of procedures during certain periods; it was shown that these peaks are linked to political will, directly or indirectly. This research also sought to examine the actors in the process, finding that the public area surveillances have a significant role in dealing with homelessness in public spaces, and that their procedure varies greatly depending on the attitude of each public area surveillances. In the areas examined, cooperation between the police and the social sector specialised for people experiencing homelessness was particularly good. In addition, the impact of criminalisation on the effectiveness of established practice in tackling homelessness in public spaces, and the balance between control and support in the process was examined.

The objective of creating the offence of *using a public space as a habitual dwelling* was clearly one of control. However, the application of the law presents a much more complex and, in view of the findings, more humane picture. In the areas studied, the practice is characterised by close cooperation between the social sphere and the police, so that control and support are more evenly balanced. This support is, of course, limited, since it only covers access to homeless shelters and medical assistance, and more effective help could only be achieved through a

comprehensive social policy. The criminalisation of homelessness has not been able to make homelessness invisible, but it has been able to keep people experiencing homelessness living on the streets under constant threat.

The author shares the view of the Constitutional Court's decision of 38/2012. (XI. 14.): the criminalisation of homelessness is a breach of fundamental rights, since it is a violation of human dignity. Although the application of the law shows a more favourable picture than the regulation itself, there is no place in a democracy based on the rule of law and human rights for legislation violating the fundamental rights of certain marginalised groups.

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Research Note

Part B

Homelessness in Rome 2024: The PIT count

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Abstract_ *For the first time, in 2024, the National Statistical Institute of Italy (Istat) supported the implementation of a survey to count people experiencing homelessness in the city of Rome, in the framework of a collaboration agreement with Roma Capitale. The survey "Notte della solidarietà" was based on a Point in Time – Street Count approach and took place on 20 April 2024. It was designed to address two main goals: a) counting people experiencing homelessness sleeping on the streets and in overnight shelters, and b) capturing some of the basic characteristics of the people experiencing homelessness by means of a questionnaire. The project was characterised by a cooperation among different institutions (Roma Capitale, Istat and the World Bank) and it made use of a participatory approach, with a strong involvement from civil society. More than 1 800 volunteer surveyors/enumerators were in charge of the survey on the street. The aim of this paper is to describe the main methodological and operational aspects of this survey. Finally, it discusses the main strengths and weaknesses of this experience, also in the perspective of the following survey that Istat is going to carry out in 2025 in the 14 Italian metropolitan city municipalities. The latter combines a Point in Time survey with an in-depth sample survey on homelessness.*

Keywords_ *Homelessness, Hard-to-reach Populations, Point in Time count, Rome, Official statistics*

[1] The authors are researchers at the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). This article is the joint work of the authors, however Introduction and Operational Aspects and Data Collection Process sections are written by Francesca Scambia, Methodology and The questionnaire sections by Eugenia De Rosa, Strengths and Weaknesses and Future prospects sections by Federico Di Leo.

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Introduction

Extreme poverty as well as social exclusion are growing concerns in the urban contexts of industrialised countries, and homelessness tends to be concentrated in the centre of the major cities forcing service providers to find possible solutions and answers. So far, both at a national and European levels, the lack of comprehensive data does not allow for adequate monitoring and policies to combat homelessness. The first obstacle lies in defining homelessness, which is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. It is indeed quite difficult to establish a clear separation between roofless persons, those living in extreme poverty, and the people experiencing social marginalisation (Braga et al., 2025). This complexity contributes to the absence of a single, universally accepted definition of homelessness across countries. Difficulties in measuring homelessness lay also in how to capture it and in the methods to collect and produce data (Hermans, 2024). "A range of data collection methods [are used] to assess homelessness, but that may underreport or "miss" specific types of homelessness or socio-demographic groups" (OECD, 2024, p.37).

Four methods of quantitative data collection have been used by national statistics on homelessness in the EU (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014; Geyer et al., 2021; Schnell and Musil, 2024): counts (street counts/service-based counts), surveys, administrative data of social-service institutions based on information on service users, and public census or register data. Since a relevant portion of the roof/homeless have no civil registration, they escape the Population and Housing Census surveys, falling in the area of the Hard-to-reach Populations. For this, and other reasons, people experiencing homelessness are rarely included in the official statistics on poverty. People experiencing homelessness require *ad hoc* sampling strategies and surveys. Non-standard and specific methods are implemented to collect data on a population that is differently featured in different cities and countries (OECD, 2024).

Indirect sampling and a Point in Time approach (PIT) are to date the two main sampling approaches used by the National Statistical Institute (Istat) in Italy (De Rosa and Inglese, 2024). In 2011 and 2014, Istat carried out national research on people living in extreme poverty in agreement with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Italian Federation of Organisations Working with the Homeless (fio.PSD) and the Italian Caritas (Istat, 2014). The surveys were based on the system of services used by people experiencing homelessness. An experimental survey was carried out in the city of Torino in 2014 to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness and not using services.

In 2024, for the first time Istat supported the implementation of a survey to count people experiencing homelessness in Rome[2] in the context of a collaboration agreement signed in 2023 with the Department of Social Policies and Health of Roma Capitale. The city survey was designed and organised following the PIT survey approach implemented in New York since 2005 and in Paris since 2018 (Apur and Ville de Paris, 2023), and the evidence of a pilot survey conducted in 2023 in the Esquilino neighbourhood of Rome. In 2023 a team of Istat reasearchers and representatives of Roma Capitale participated in the city survey in Paris. The survey in Rome enabled Istat researchers to detect the main methodological aspects to be matched with organisational issues in order to achieve better results in such a complex city. This note describes and critically analyses this experience.

Methodology

The survey "Notte della solidarietà" adopted a PIT approach, which is currently the leading source of data on people experiencing homelessness in the big cities (Schneider et al. 2016). This methodology involves counting on a specific night on a specific time frame individuals experiencing homelessness who are found on the streets, in parks, or other public spaces, and in some cases in overnight shelters. In most cases, individual data are collected (e.g., Hungary, Denmark, Sweden), in other countries, such as Finland and Portugal, aggregate data are collected (Develtere, 2022).

A PIT method offers a snapshot of homelessness, and when done on a regular basis, can give important information on profiles and trends. It does not give information about the 'invisible homeless' (people not sleeping on the street nor using homeless services) and the flow of homelessness that can be investigated with the integration of other approaches (Shinn et al., 2024). For example, the Nordic countries and Belgium adopt a multi-method measurement: available data are combined with a local multi-stakeholder monitoring system (Develtere, 2022).

Following the ETHOS (European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion) classification, the target population of this survey included two types: people living in public space or external space (ETHOS 1) and people living in overnight shelters (ETHOS 2). Though not drafted for statistical purposes, rather for practical and policy making purposes, this classification is a crucial reference in studying the homeless population. However, ETHOS is not a common European standard for national data collection strategies (ibidem).

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2 Istat expert researchers that participated in the project are: Valeria de Martino, Eugenia De Rosa, Federico Di Leo (project manager), Vanessa Ioannoni, Nadia Nur, Francesca Scambia, plus Arianna Gatta (University of Brisbane). Binario 95 is the body contracted by Roma Capitale for the logistics.

The project "Notte della solidarietà" was designed to address two main goals: 1) counting people experiencing homelessness sleeping on the streets and in overnight shelters, and 2) capturing some of the basic characteristics of the people experiencing homelessness. Information was to be collected by non-professional surveyors/enumerators filling in a short electronic questionnaire.

The survey took place on 20 April 2024. For the PIT count, winter time has been traditionally chosen. However there is a lack of established best practice regarding operational decisions such as the reference period of the count, which season of the year (Braga et al., 2025). To note also that in recent years some cities, such as Milano in Italy, are going in the field also in summer time to compare the different trends and to study homelessness flows.

The project was characterised by a cooperation among different institutions (Roma Capitale, Istat, and the World Bank) and it made use of a participatory approach, with a strong involvement from civil society. Volunteers and grass-roots organisations walked through the streets and squares of the cities during a specific night using a questionnaire. As highlighted in the literature, the great strength of this methodology is "the mobilisation of citizens and local organisations as well as the sensitisation of public opinion and policy makers through local media" (Develtere, 2022, p.8).

The project started with some preliminary meetings organised by the local administration, in collaboration with Istat and the non-profit organisations dealing with homelessness (such as Caritas, Sant'Egidio, the Red Cross, etc.). The meetings intended to make associations aware of the research project and to improve Istat's knowledge of the target population. Knowing in advance the habits, location, and concentration of the homeless population in the city, as well as the shelters' organisation, was crucial for the survey design. These meetings were also the occasion to make volunteers aware of their task and foster their collaboration in the whole project.

A pilot survey was carried out in March 2023 in the Esquilino area, a neighbourhood of Rome with a high concentration of people experiencing homeless due to the presence of the Central railway station. About 200 volunteers, in their majority from associations committed to tackle extreme poverty, together with medical university students of Rome, acted as volunteer surveyors/enumerators. The whole Esquilino neighbourhood was divided into 24 areas of about 2/3 km walking distance each. A team, composed by 3-5 volunteers trained to act as surveyors/enumerators had to walk the all area-distance. The pilot survey also included the guests of an emergency overnight shelter located in front of the Termini central station and operating during winter time.

The experience of the pilot survey led to the design of the methodological and organisational framework of the 2024 city survey. A new version of the questionnaire with more information (e.g., work, services, health), to be used both on the street and in the overnight shelters, was developed and a more complex data collection strategy was designed (De Rosa et.al., 2025). The main tool was the CAPI technique. For the city survey, a contracted body was in charge of the logistics/organisation after a call by Roma Capitale.

For the first target population – people living in public space or external space (ETHOS 1) – the detection area was limited to the area of the railway ring of Rome, therefore including the city centre, plus some railway stations out of the ring and a part of Municipality 10[3] (Ostia), particularly interesting for the target population. Though the detection area was limited, it represents a relevant part of the urbanised area. The municipality of Rome (Figure 1) includes vast agricultural areas (50.1% of the total – yellow colour in Figure 1), public parks and nature reserves (9.0% of the total – in green), while residential buildings or areas for civil use are only 19.9% of the total (in grey).

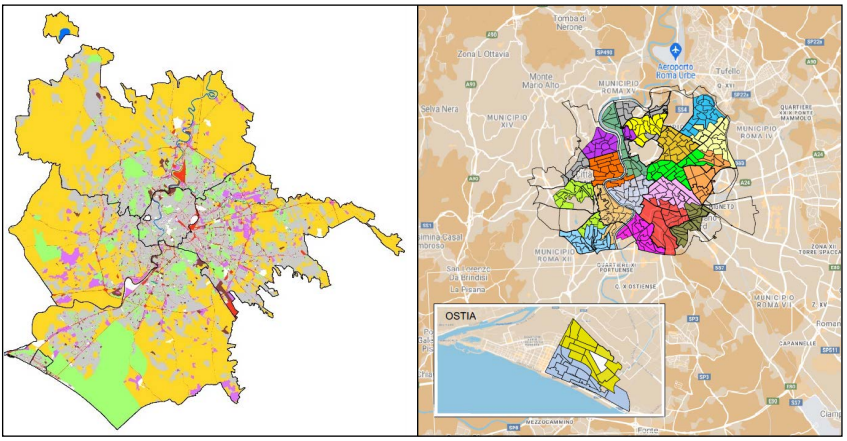
The detection area represented a relatively small part of the whole city (3.7% of the total), but it is very important for the goals of the research as it is intensively populated (20% of the total) and includes wide industrial areas, public buildings, quarters, and infrastructures (e.g., railway stations, large parts of the underground network) as well as services for people experiencing homelessness.

The territory was divided into smaller survey zones (Figure 2) and also included two types of 'special areas': hospital outbuildings and gardens plus the paved banks of the Tiber river in the city centre. Volunteers were in charge of the survey on the street. More than 1 800 volunteer surveyors/enumerators registered themselves to participate in the night survey answering a call on the Web. As for the 'special areas', the hospital staff conducted the survey in the hospital outbuildings, while in the gardens and the paved banks of the Tiber, the local police collected the information. In both cases there were not individual interviews, but just the recording of the total number of the roofless people, their sex, and, when possible, their nationality.

3 The city of Rome is divided into first-level administrative subdivisions named Municipalities.

Fig. 1 – The City of Rome and the detection area

Fig. 2 – Detection area and survey zones



Source: Istat (2024) Notte della Solidarietà

For the second target population – people living in night shelters (ETHOS 2) – the choice was on facilities that are directly accessed by people experiencing a condition of roof/homelessness, excluding specific facilities for migrants (e.g., CAS and SAI)[4], as well as those that host women victims of violence for their protection, and Housing First/Housing Led. The detection area for shelters was not limited to the so-called 'Rail-Ring Area', but it covered the entire territory of the city. The survey in the night shelters was carried out by the people in charge of these facilities, as it happens in the PIT count carried out, for example, in NYC (Schneider et al. 2016).

This type of counting exercise suffers from a 'service paradox': "the more services are available, the more people experiencing homelessness are registered and counted" (EC and Develter, 2022, p.9). It must also be noted that people experiencing long-term homelessness are over-represented in many PIT counts. There are other critical issues of the unsheltered count to be taken into account, such as that "the reported number is almost certainly an undercount because rough sleepers often have good reasons to remain hidden… counts are often undertaken by people with little methodological training, and methods vary across communities" (Shinn et al., 2024, p.2). However a key advantage of the PIT count remains that it catches, or is able to catch, people experiencing homelessness who do not make use of services. These data are crucial for supporting local homeless services and provide information for shelters and affordable housing as well as more long-term solutions for people and families who are at-risk of falling into homelessness.

4 CAS (Centres for the Extraordinary Reception), SAI (reception and integration system).

The Questionnaire

The platform chosen for the web questionnaire was Survey Solutions provided by the World Bank, a friendly tool easy to install on the smartphone. Some information, such as the area, the surveyor code, the questionnaire progressive number, and the starting time were pre-loaded in each individual questionnaire. The individual questionnaire was aimed at recording the number of both the sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness. It had to be completed for every single person experiencing homelessness aged 18 years and over in order to provide the basic information to draft the profile of people experiencing homelessness.

The CAPI questionnaire was divided into three parts. In the first, the surveyor alone, with no interaction with the person encountered, filled in the information required including the estimated age and gender of the person believed to be homeless, and the full address of the meeting place. All the produced questionnaires were anonymous. A specific question distinguished the street from night shelter detection. For the survey on people living in public space or external space, on the basis of objective signs (such as being placed in a certain place with blankets, or being on the move carrying bulky objects, etc.), the team assessed whether to consider the person encountered as homeless and started counting and filling out the questionnaire. Surveyors were then asked to detail the type of place where the person was encountered (e.g., railway station, garden or green area, car park, etc.), the type of bedding or clothing, whether or not appropriate for the season. For the purpose of counting, one tent counted one person and the same was for cars (one questionnaire) regardless of the number of people; in the case of closed tents and cars, the instruction was to count only, without carrying out the interview.

The second part of the questionnaire required interaction with the person and was aimed at defining eligibility and collecting some socio-demographic information, such as the employment status, health, and the use of services. The interviewer, after briefly presenting the aim of the survey, collected the explicit consent of a person to participate in the short interview. In the event of a denial, the reasons for the refusal had to be indicated. In the night shelters, the only fact of being a guest in the facility was an evidence that the person belonged to the target population. For the survey on people living in public space or external space, two questions in particular completed the set of information to test eligibility: i.e., a question on age, only persons who were 18 and over could be interviewed, anda question on where the person was going to sleep that night. The interview ended for those who stated they were going to sleep in a house (their own or a friends/relatives/third parties' house), in a caravan, or camper van, as they were not included in the target population. For those who say they were going to sleep on the street or in other makeshift accommodation, more specific information was collected on where the person was

going to sleep and the reasons why they were not sleeping in a night shelter. A further question 'where did you sleep in the last seven days?' helped to better characterise the condition of the respondent.

A set of core information was collected both for the survey on the street and in the night shelters, i.e., the length of stay in the city of Rome (and in Italy for foreigners), the country of birth, possession of Italian citizenship, employment (distinguishing between those who were working at the time of the survey, those who were not employed but had worked in the past, those who have never worked, and those who were retired), and the use of services for the homeless (such as the distribution of food parcels, clothing, outpatient clinics/distribution of medicines, showers and/or personal hygiene services, canteens, distribution of blankets, drinks, food or other items, night or day shelters, etc.). Another dimension was health, investigated by means of a question on the subjective perception on their health and a more 'objective' question: asking 'When you are sick and need treatment, whom do you go to?'. The interview ended by asking the person whether they resided in an Italian municipality, in order to indirectly investigate the possibility of benefiting from various rights. The time of completion was then recorded. When useful, the questions included the response 'I do not know/prefer not to answer' and 'it was not possible to detect'. In order to gather information on aspects that were not considered in the conceptualisation of the phenomenon, the answer options often included the option 'other', with blank lines to specify in the absence of a codified answer, and in order to adapt answers to the respondent.

The third and final part of the questionnaire was filled in by the surveyor/enumerator alone on the basis of their assessment. They recorded whether the person showed or said they had one or more identity documents during the interview. By means of multi-response questions, an attempt was made to understand the quality of the information collected by asking the surveyor to indicate whether the person experiencing homelessness showed they properly understood the Italian language, if they were altered (by alcohol, drugs, psychotropic drugs, etc.), and/or had health problems, specifying their nature in a blank field. In this way, data on some characteristics were collected both based on the perception of the respondent (in the second part of the questionnaire) and on the assessment by the surveyor. Finally, some blank lines were provided for comments and other remarks concerning the person encountered (for example, whether the person was with other people, had a pet, etc.) but also on the interview, asking, for example, if for some reasons the interview could not be completed, or if the information/answers provided by the person experiencing homelessness appeared unreliable, indicating these cases.

For all the 'special areas' – hospital outbuildings and gardens plus the paved banks of the Tiber river in the city centre – a specific questionnaire was designed just to record aggregates related to the number of people experiencing homelessness counted, their sex (male/female/info not available), age group (18-24/25-39/40-54/ over 54) and when possible, the nationality (Italian/not Italian/ info not available) and origin by geographical area (Europe, Maghreb and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Americas, Asia, Other, or info not available). A PAPI questionnaire was used and a targeted training was designed for this tool. A similar form was also designed to collect data in those night shelters where individual interviews were not possible.

Operational Aspects and Data Collection Process

Training

For a very challenging survey with non-professional surveyors and aimed at a Hard-to-reach Population, training played a crucial role (Develtere, 2022). Istat designed the training that was directly carried out by Istat researchers with the cluster coordinators, while the external body in charge of the logistics carried out the training of the team leaders. For the purpose, two video tutorials were prepared: one on the questionnaire app, and one on the way to approach people experiencing homelessness in the street and in the night shelters to properly conduct the interview. Simple instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire, also in the case of non-interaction with people experiencing homelessness, were provided. Also instruction on what to do (e.g., make sure to cover the entire assigned area/zone – maintain an appropriate distance from the interlocutor), and what not to do (e.g., do not request any documents and do not take photographs) were provided in a printed document after the training.

In the field: PIT on the street

Volunteers were in charge of counting and conducting the survey on the street. The territory for the PIT count on the street was divided into 338 survey zones to be surveyed in the city centre, and particularly within the railway ring plus some other interesting areas for the purpose. All the areas were grouped in 20 clusters, each one had a cluster coordinator which was the reference person for all the team leaders of that cluster.

An online platform was created for the registration of volunteers and team leaders. Each team was assigned one area to be surveyed, they had to go to their area walking through all its streets, checking also people sleeping in cars or tents. Detailed maps, with instructions, were developed in collaboration with the cartog-

raphers of Roma Capitale, marking the all path to be walked for each team. The perimeters which marked the area borders were divided according to the side, so that each team was aware of their task and competence.

Each team was organised by assigning different tasks and roles so that team members knew how to support their team. Roles were organised as follows: the team leader divided up the tasks, filled out a final account of the people met ('team summary'), collected the questionnaires at the end of the survey, and addressed all critical issues; the guide showed the other team members the route to follow in the assigned area; the interviewer approached the person experiencing homelessness on the road and proceeded with the observation-interview by providing answers to the interviewer; and the compiler wrote in the questionnaire the information collected or observed.

Special attention was paid to the composition of the teams, in terms of age, gender, and expertise, trying to have at least one member of the associations supporting the homeless and one university student. The associations were very much involved and interested in facilitating the phenomenon of people experiencing homelessness to emerge. Their skill in approaching people experiencing homelessness was very helpful for the survey. On the other hand, students helped to focus on the aim of the survey and maintain a rigorous approach to data collection.

On the "Notte della Solidarietà" the teams (one team one area) gathered in their clusters. Each cluster had a meeting point. They received all the necessary materials together with the bib to be recognised as interviewers. All team leaders were in charge of using the app and saving all the data. A few paper questionnaires were provided for emergency cases only.

The survey (street count) started at 9.30 pm on Saturday, 20 April 2024. The temperature was relatively cold for the season: 12 degrees Celsius. The last team concluded the survey at 00: 30 am. A final account of the people met and the collected questionnaires was provided by each team using a paper form (Summary Report) to monitor the field and allow a comparison between the information saved in the app and the real team count.

The survey also included the collection of aggregated data in hospital outbuildings and gardens plus the paved banks of the Tiber river in the city centre by the hospital staff and the local police.

In the field: PIT in the overnight shelters

The provision of overnight shelters is the main solution adopted by local administrations in Italy to meet the needs of roofless and people experiencing homelessness. There are different types of night shelters: some are permanent, i.e., they are open

all year round, while others open during emergency periods only, when the so-called 'Cold Plan' comes into force (December-March/April). The emergency facilities are set up in derogation to habitability regulations in order to ensure protection from low temperatures; the big marquees set up during the winter are typical example of them. An ordinance issued by the mayor requires the municipal authority in charge to undertake initiatives to mitigate the difficulties of the weaker social groups, with particular regard to the roof/homeless.

In Rome, as in other cities, there are facilities that operate in agreement with the local administration, at the departmental (the whole city) or municipal level, while other facilities are provided by private no-profit bodies (religious orders, parishes, associations, etc.). The services offer different daily coverage: i.e., H24 and H15. Breakfast is generally included while dinner and lunch depend on the opening times. Other available services are showers and the change of clothes. The management of night shelters in the capital city has, as mentioned, several levels: the main number of beds is attributable to the facilities financed in agreement with the Department of Social and Health Policies of Roma Capitale. Other places are located in the various municipalities within the city using funds allocated by the central administration to establish small overnight facilities to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in different areas of the city of Rome. The Sala Operativa Sociale (SOS) is in charge of sorting the hospitality in the facilities at a central level (Department). The SOS was, on the first "Notte della Solidarietà", the reference point for the identification of both departmental and municipal overnight shelters. It also worked on the list of facilities managed by the private sector through contacts with the associations and the whole no-profit involved in tackling extreme poverty and marginalisation.

Definition and construction of the list

At Istat's request, and for the first time, the Department drafted a list of both financed and private facilities available overall in the area of the Roma Capitale. To this end, Istat provided a definition of the facilities to be included in the initial list, i.e., of a transitory, emergency, low-threshold nature. Therefore, as already mentioned, the choice was on facilities that are directly accessed by people experiencing a condition of roof/homelessness, and who move from shelter to shelter.

For the construction of the updated list, Istat started matching the list of the facilities financed in agreement with Roma Capitale and the list prepared on the occasion of the research 'InStrada, per conoscere chi è senza dimora' (Gatta, 2022). The information was then checked and updated with the help of Roma Capitale and the "Permanent table of the associations combating extreme poverty".[5] The list, prepared

5 Institutional body on extreme poverty created by Roma Capitale to share information with associations tackling extreme poverty.

in April 2024, included both permanent and emergency facilities still open at the date of the survey. The 48 night shelters on the list were divided into: departmental-financed shelters (23), municipally-financed shelters (11), and shelters run by non-profit and private organisations (14). The list included facilities of different size ranging from the Caritas shelter, which accommodates almost 200 people, to small centres for 5-6 people. For this reason, the number of staff needed to carry out the survey was defined according to the shelters' capacity. A ratio of one interviewer for every 20 guests was established, outsourcing interviewers in centres with a limited staff.

Data collection in shelters

In order to carry out the survey, the Social Operating Service (SOS) of Roma Capitale, was in charge of contacting all the shelters in the week before the survey. They checked shelters' availability on the "Notte della Solidarietà". Out of the 48 facilities on the list, nine did not make themselves available for individual interviews, while one refused to participate because they were under restoration and another one did not meet the definition adopted. The unavailability to carry out individual interviews was limited to facilities run by religious orders. Istat prepared a specific form to collect data in those night shelters where individual interviews were not possible. This form, together with some information on the shelter, collected aggregated data on the number of men and women, the age of the guests divided into four classes, and their origin divided into five areas, namely Italy, the Middle East and Maghreb, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Ten shelters filled-in this form for a total number of 287 individuals. All the other facilities conducted individual interviews alike in the street and on the same evening.

The survey (shelter count) started at 5.30 pm on Saturday, 20 April 2024. The last team concluded the survey at 23: 30 pm. During the survey a control room was settled at the Campidoglio, where the proper entrance of data was monitored. Several telephone lines were organised to give direct support to surveyors, as well as to people in the night shelters, in order to ensure a total coverage.

Main Results

The 2024 PIT count in Rome provided information on the number of unsheltered persons in the so-called Rail Ring of Rome and part of the district of Ostia. It also enabled us to have figures on how many persons in the whole city use the overnight shelters, emergency shelters, and similar transitory solutions for the homeless. On the "Notte della Solidarità", 948 people throughout the 338 survey zones of the detection area were found to experience homelessness, additionally 70 people were counted both in hospital out-buildings-gardens and along the paved banks of the Tiber river ('special areas'). People hosted in the 47 winter shelters, emergency

shelters, and similar transitory solutions amounted to 1 186 (sheltered homeless). The grand total of the PIT-Count is 2 204 (Table 1).

The majority of the people experiencing homelessness were detected in the areas near the main Railway Station (Termini) and the Vatican City, particularly at St. Peter's Basilica area. Relevant presence of homelessness was along the main underground and railway stations. In Figure 3, the distribution of the unsheltered homeless in the city survey zones is marked by different grey nuances according to the number of counted people. Unsheltered homeless were detected in 204 survey zones out of the total 338 (i.e., in 60.4% of the zones); 15 of them were characterised by a higher presence (10 or more people experiencing homelessness), while in 134 zones, no people experiencing homelessness were detected.

Table 1 – Total People experiencing homelessness counted (2024). Absolute and Percentage Values

PIT COUNT SECTOR		Homeless	Percentage
Unsheltered Homeless			
Direct Individual Count	CAPI Questionnaires	815	
Aggregated Count	PAPI Questionnaires	133	
Total Count Areas		948	43.0
Hospital Out-Buildings and Gardens Aggregated Count	PAPI Questionnaires	22	
Paved banks of the Tiber river Aggregated Count	PAPI Questionnaires	48	
Total Count Special Areas		70	3.2
Grand Total Unsheltered Homeless		**1 018**	**46.2**
Sheltered Homeless			
Direct Count	CAPI Questionnaires	891	
Aggregated Count	PAPI Questionnaires	295	
Grand Total Sheltered Homeless		**1 186**	**53.8**
GRAND TOTAL (Unsheltered + Sheltered Homeless)		**2 204**	**100.0**

Source: Istat (2024) Notte della Solidarietà

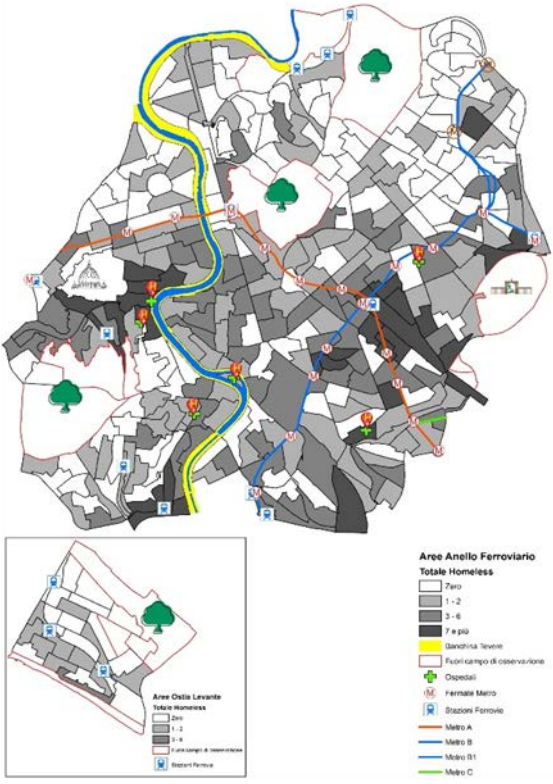
Women experiencing homelessness accounted for 15.3% of the total number of people on the streets; along the banks of the Tiber, the presence of women was only 8.3%. This percentage raised to 27.9% for the overnight shelters.[6] The modal age class was lower for unsheltered homeless (aged between 40-49), while the largest class for the sheltered was between 60 and 69. A relevant presence of the over-69-year-olds was also detected (11%) in the overnight shelters.

Italy is the nationality mainly present (17.5% of street homeless and 23.6% of the sheltered), while Romania is the country with the second highest number (20.1% and 10.6% respectively). The other countries with the highest number of respond-

6 Data from the overnight shelters were collected in the whole city and not in the selected area.

ents are Somalia (4.2% and 5.3%) and Morocco (5.8% and 2.6%).[7] Only 9.9% of the unsheltered had access to clinics and centres distributing medicines, compared to 20.2% of the sheltered group, this fact could indicate either a difficulty in accessing services due to a lack of information, or a greater amount of information and/or care on the part of the sheltered persons. People encountered in the street reported using the shower facilities and the distribution of meals and other comforts (37.1% and 23.1% respectively) much more often than the sheltered people (22.9% and 7.8% respectively). The latter probably make use of showers within the shelters.

Fig. 3 – Unsheltered homeless counted in the survey zones of Rome



Source: Istat (2024) Notte della Solidarietà

[7] These data are based on the interviews carried out by the surveyors and do not include the aggregate data received with the paper questionnaires (the number of sheltered people individually interviewed is 600).

Strengths and Weaknesses

In terms of coverage, the results do not provide an exhaustive, though still significant, measure of the unsheltered homelessness. On the contrary, the figures of sheltered homelessness are exhaustive. At a first stage the PIT count in Rome was supposed to cover the entire area of the city. From an operational perspective, covering such a large area in one night requires recruiting and training a huge number of interviewers, resulting in high costs (Gatta, 2022). For this reason, the partners agreed on carrying out the survey on the unsheltered homeless in a limited area of the city.

As for the case of the 'special areas', (hospital outbuildings/gardens and the paved banks of the Tiber), the count was not exhaustive, particularly focussing on the Roma Capitale. The count provided information on some specific areas which are particularly interesting to produce a snapshot of homelessness in the city. NYC uses advanced methodological approaches to ensure the effectiveness of their counts (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014). These methodological approaches were partly used for the "Notte della Solidarietà". Indirect estimates of homelessness in the entire Municipality could be provided. A first exercise, taking into account differences in the homeless population density that increases in areas with different topographic classifications (e.g., parks, residential areas), was presented in 2024 at the UNECE Group of Experts on Measuring Poverty and Inequality (Di Leo et al., 2024).

The questionnaire had to be short, thus could neither deepen the homeless' story nor the mobility of people experiencing the different forms of homelessness (Demaerschalk et al., 2018). Also, the causes of homelessness could not be properly investigated. The count was conducted at the end of April, i.e., during spring time which is not a recommended period for such a survey as known homelessness is affected by seasonality, therefore the results cannot be compared with similar PIT count in other cities. During weekends is also not recommended. The best practice is to conduct the survey during winter, as homelessness is highly influenced by seasonality and the goal is to assess the core of the phenomenon.

From the organisational point of view, the survey was quite complex – as is normal for a PIT count – especially for the involvement of non-professional and volunteer surveyors. However, it worked quite well thanks to different reasons: a) the personal motivation of the involved citizens, b) the training, and c) the matching of teams, composed by members of associations and university students. The latter was crucial to have a mix of different ages and approaches to the people experiencing homelessness, which took advantage both from the associations' experience and from the students' rigorous sticking to the provided rules. In addition to that, it should be noted that the involvement of a large number of volunteers help raise

awareness among the general public (Hermans, 2024). On the other hand, the involvement of universities, especially medical students, was the first step for an experimental project of street medicine. The latter has an implication not only for people living on the street, but also for the whole community living in the area. The Tor Vergata University is a forerunner in this perspective.

The willingness and interest of local governments to collect data was another crucial issue in carrying out studies and surveys on this 'very' hard-to-reach population. As far as it concerns Italy, the local governments, such as municipality, are in charge of finding responses and solutions to homelessness and to design policies for it. Agreements with these bodies could be the way of funding initiatives of research as it was for the case of Rome in the "Notte della Solidarità".

De-briefing

In order to draw useful information for following initiatives or editions, a de-briefing was organised by Istat with the 20 cluster coordinators. Some critical aspects emerged: more training needed to cover all the aspects, focusing especially on the questionnaire; clarifying the goals of counting and interviewing; thinking about a different distribution of teams in the territory considering that some areas had no people experiencing homelessness; and providing also English and French versions of the questionnaire to facilitate the interaction. Cluster coordinators also suggested to add more questions on access to services and discriminatory practices; adding in the team kit useful information on homelessness and the available services. Finally, some technical problems with the Survey Solutions app and time delays occurred suggesting further attention on this aspect. The major concern was with the Summary Reports, which were filled in by not more than 50% of the Teams. A general underreport resulted from the comparison between the Summary Reports and the app data flow, it accounted for approx. 10% of the counted people.

Future Prospects

The project carried out in Rome has increased Istat experience in carrying out research on people experiencing homelessness. It enabled us to test the PIT count in the largest Italian city. Some issues emerged as crucial for a successful survey and for future implementation. The main challenges are connected with definitions (the counted population), and the territory to be analysed as clearly emerged in the case of Rome.

It should be also considered to broaden the service-based counts to a range of social-service institutions. In this way, people in different ETHOS categories could be contacted. However, the 'service paradox': "density and quality of the service

system have a strong impact on data output; people that are not entitled to use or are not in touch with social-service institutions are not recorded" (Hermans, 2024 p.198) has to be taken into account. Additionally, regions and areas with a weak service network and institutions are partially mapped.

As stated by Schnell and Musil (2024, p.124) "it is widely acknowledged that a comprehensive measurement of the extent and profile of homelessness should rely on multiple data collection methods and data sources, addressing different dimensions of this phenomenon". Different methods bring into light various aspects of homelessness (Benjaminsen and Dyb, 2010).

In order to take into account this complexity, within the framework of the National Census, the decision was made of implementing the PIT count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness in the main Italian cities, the 14 Centres of Metropolitan areas. This survey is planned to go in the field by the end of 2025 and the beginning of 2026. The Istat national project will combine the first aim of counting people experiencing homelessness in order to know the dimension of homelessness, and at the same time is intended to deepen the reasons for homelessness and the causes of it by conducting a sample survey on the same target population after the count. Therefore, future PIT surveys are going to be planned together with a census of the services provided for people experiencing homelessness. This project is part of a wider plan of establishing a permanent Observatory on the extreme poverty by means of agreements with national institutional actors (e.g., The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies) and carrying out other surveys focused on specific topics, such as the available services or the associations and bodies working to tackle extreme poverty and monitoring the phenomenon.

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Review Essay

Part C

The Provocations of Homelessness – The Zeitgeist and its Critics: A Review Essay

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The Routledge Handbook of Homelessness, by Bretherton, J. & Pleace, N. (Eds.) (2023) Oxford & New York: Routledge

For a Liberatory Politics of Home, by Lancione, M. (2023) Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Mean Streets: Homelessness, Public Space and the Limits of Capital, by Mitchell, D. (2020) Athens: University of Georgia Press

It is the contention of this essay that collectively the three recently published books cited above deftly capture the essence of and the controversy associated with the 'zeitgeist' – the intellectual, moral and cultural climate – of early 21st century homelessness research and scholarship.[1] The essence of this zeitgeist is twofold: The emergence of a refined narrative of causation which promotes a contextual reading of homelessness as the outcome of a complex combination of personal/individual and structural/systemic causes and the fusion of this 'new orthodoxy' with a paradigm shift in which 'housing-ready' has been superseded by 'housing-led'[2] in many (though not all) homelessness policy agendas. This zeitgeist however is also

1 This is not to suggest that these books are in anyway unique in this respect. Other publications which arguably achieve the same or similar ends are of course available. Indeed within a few months of the publication of Bretherton and Pleace's *Handbook*, Routledge itself had published a further handbook *Global Perspectives on Homelessness, Law & Policy* (Chris Bevan, 2024) and Edward Elgar had published its own *Research Handbook on Homelessness* (Johnson *et al* 2024). The overlap in authorship between these three publications is conspicuous.

2 The terminology has become a little blurred: in most circumstances and certainly in this essay 'housing-led' – otherwise known as 'rapid rehousing' denotes programmes that provide permanent housing as quickly as possible for all who need it. 'Housing-first' in its original formulation in the USA was designed specifically for chronic homelessness with attendant support. See: Homeless Link Policy & Research Team (2015).

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characterised by a challenging discrepancy: While we know an awful lot about its causes and potential treatment, homelessness nevertheless persists and is intensifying rapidly in many rural and especially urban environments.[3] It is this failure of purpose which defines and encapsulates the provocations[4] of homelessness referred to in the title of this essay.

Each of the publications considered here are major works of scholarship. Together they tackle a wide breadth of sometimes overlapping issues, yet each has a distinctive, identifiable focus. In *Mean Streets*, Don Mitchell's objective is to systematise 'a *theory* of the social and economic logic' behind the persistence of homelessness; in *Liberatory Politics*, Michele Lancione challenges the current conceptual frameworks and established norms of how we interpret and study 'homelessness' and especially 'home'- an *epistemological endeavour*. Among the numerous themes that characterise the *Handbook* edited by Joanne Bretherton and Nicholas Pleace, *praxis* – relating to the strategies, policies, programmes and performance of those agencies (including the state) charged with the delivery of homelessness services – stands out as the most pervasive. These three complementary themes – praxis, epistemic and theory – provide the analytical framework for the following exploration of the provocations of homelessness.

Praxis Provocations

Bretherton and Pleace's edited collection is a 'big' book both in its intellectual scope and in its physical size: 41 chapters, 450 pages and near 2 million words. In marshalling contributions from a host of respected and established researchers (45 in total) and in contributing their own distinctive and always illuminating overview commentaries, the editors are to be congratulated.

The *Handbook* encompasses a wide range of homelessness issues, inter alia: history, causation, measurement, disciplinary approaches, and various dimensions of homelessness – gender, sexuality, migration, ethnicity, rural and veteran experiences, health, substance use, and the human costs of homelessness. In these and other chapters the issues highlighted by the editors in their conclusion

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3 For recent European trends see https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/07/15/homelessness-on-the-rise-in-uk-and-france-how-do-european-countries-compare [Accessed May 2025]

4 Mirosław Karwat (2023) in his authoritative *Theory of Provocation* defines provocation as any behaviour, event or situation that stimulates a response. These behaviours, events and situations can be small or large in scale, from a conversational gambit to a declaration of war; they can be classified as constructive (leading to positive change) or destructive (negative change). The focus of this essay is the 'condition' of homelessness and the 'responses' it has recently provoked in terms of developing our understanding and knowledge among practitioners and policy makers and within academia and the wider research community.

'of mutually reinforcing relationships [of homelessness] with inequality, poverty and stigmatisation' (p. 434) are demonstrated. The final section, comprising one-third of the book, presents 17 concise country case studies. *As an 'educational resource' (p.1) and a 'reference text' (p. 9)* – the *Handbook* fulfils its purpose in identifying key theoretical and methodological issues all closely linked to the praxis of homelessness service delivery.

Given the book's coverage and achievements it might seem a touch invidious to gripe about perceived absences, yet inevitably there are some. The editors acknowledge that the focus is on the global north (plus Australia, China and Japan) and reasonably claim that this reflects the geography of the bulk of published scholarship. Yet the absence of virtually any reference to the iniquitous levels of homelessness among the 40 percent of the world's population living in Africa, the Indian sub-continent, Latin America, [5] the Caribbean and Russia is disappointing. Further, the immediate voices of 'homelessness' are underrepresented, ethnographic narratives hardly get a look-in and regrettably, while there are scattered references – in what arguably can be seen as the most striking absences – there is no extended consideration of the interrelated issues of the operation of housing markets or of homelessness prevention strategies.[6]

If there is a shared message among the many and diverse contributions[7] to this *Handbook* it is that in recent times there has been tangible progress in advancing both our understanding of the nature and composition of homelessness in all its complexity and in utilizing this enhanced understanding in instigating a praxis which deploys effective programmes and policies designed to alleviate the plight of homelessness people.

The country chapters (24 to 41) clearly record the widespread recognition and – though less widespread – adoption of the new paradigm whereby housing-first and housing-led programmes have been accepted as effective advancements on previously dominant housing-ready approaches. And – while 'zombie ideas' (p. 31-32) still persist in relation to causality – the concomitant acceptance of a structural understanding of homelessness as a social phenomenon is endorsed. While such acceptance and adoption is to be celebrated, the *Handbook*'s contributors also recognise that the implementation of these programmes varies considerably across

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5 With the one exception of Uruguay, see Chapter 40

6 COVID's interruption of the publication timeline – a 5 year gap between commission and printing – might account for some of these 'deficiencies'. See Nicholas Pleace's chapter on COVID-19 and Homelessness (Chapter 7).

7 There are many other interesting themes in the *Handbook* which for want of time and space are not touched on in this review. As one example only: on the 'changing face of homelessness' as a consequence of climate change and migration.

geo-political jurisdictions from, for example, high commitment in Finland and Denmark (Chapters 28 & 27)[8] through to a token or no commitment in Poland, Slovenia and China (Chapters 34, 36 & 26)

Embedded within this uneven embrace of the zeitgeist are advances in many protocols, policies, methodologies and practices though, as with the zeitgeist as a whole, their chronological and geographic adoption and implementation is also uneven (see Baptista and Marlier, 2019). Foremost among the acknowledged advances is the recognition of the importance of evidence-based decision making and the parallel adoption of clearer and inclusive definitions of homelessness plus a corresponding increasing sophistication of data collection and data analysis.[9] FEANTSA's typology of homelessness – ETHOS – has been instrumental here in an attempt to provide a common language (Edgar, 2012). Yet comparability of collected data across jurisdictions remains challenging due to the persistence of variations in definitions, data collection methods and reporting practices (Chapter 4 & 12; editorial commentary, pp 2-5).[10]

The contributions to Section 3 of the *Handbook*, 'The Dimensions of Homelessness', provide substantive illustrations of progress. The compilation of knowledgeable and informative accounts of homelessness among such heterogeneous groups defined on the basis of gender, sexuality, age, family disposition, migration status, substance use, rurality, veteran status and so forth is itself a testimony to an expanding and inclusive evidence base. That this base is still 'rapidly shifting' (p.147) and that 'significant gaps' (p. 433) remain reflect continuing problems of identification, access and accurate reporting of 'homelessness as a relative state' (p. 2) and, equally importantly, the impact of conceptual advances in understanding the diversity within these subgroups and their intersectionality with wider social, political and cultural processes.

The adoption of 'strength-based' (person centred) approaches to social and medical care with an accompanying emphasis on empowerment and the identification and development of capacities (agency) of individuals is a further indicator of praxis progression (Chapters 9, 12 & 22). In the related deliberations on welfare systems (Chapter 6) and complex needs (Chapter 21) it is implied that these social

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8 As of April 2024 Sweden can be added to this list: https://www.staff.lu.se/article/finally-housing-first-model-adopted-national-strategy [Accessed May 2025]

9 The term 'evidence based' is however fiercely contested within social science. See for example, Stanhope (2011)

10 See also ''European Homelessness Counts a study commissioned by the European Commission to develop a common methodology of data collection on homelessness in the EU. https://www.internationalhu.com/research/projects/european-homelessness-count [Accessed June 2025]

care policies/ programmes are strongly and logically associated with societies where social welfare programmes are comprehensive and inclusive – especially Nordic countries (Chapters 6 & 21)

The 'right to housing' (Chapter 5) was initially highlighted in UN 1948 Human Rights Declaration and incorporated in the 1976 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. More recently a 'rights perspective' structured the 2021 EU *Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness* and is now embedded in the constitutions of several EU and other countries while elsewhere justiciable rights to housing have been enshrined in law. Adoption of the right to housing does not obligate individual countries to provide housing for all its citizens – the praxis implications are more modest. Right to housing does however facilitate the creation of a legal bulwark for the enforcement of legislation regarding such issues as ensuring security of tenure and protection against discrimination and, in its most generous interpretation, the obligation to house homeless people. Increasing commitment to the right to housing is seen as emblematic of a growing aspiration to ensure all citizens are adequately housed and importantly provides a further stimulus to tackle the inherent problems of homelessness. Welcome though the embrace of homelessness in the human rights agenda is, [11] it is also the case that these rights are all too frequently violated with impunity. This dissonance between housing rights (an ethical principle) and homelessness (a social injustice) demonstrates that 'what is passed into law is not always enforceable by law' – legislation is never enough. [12]

Among other advances highlighted in the *Handbook* is the debunking of homelessness myths associated with causation (Chapter 3), addiction (Chapter 22) and homelessness among families/ women and children (Chapters 11 &16). Kuhn and Culhane's (1998) use of cluster analysis on time series data in demonstrating that long-term homelessness is accounted for by a relatively small number of chronic homeless while more numerous episodic and crisis homelessness is generally short term and often a one-off experience has been particularly influential – for both its findings and in introducing a methodology that has been replicated by many (Chapter 3). Addiction and mental health problems are now demonstrably as much a product of homelessness as they are a contribution to homelessness (Chapter 22). Homelessness among families (women and children) is predominantly due to domestic abuse and poverty rather than to individual/ personality traits or behaviours; in the world of homelessness women are resilient survivors. Chapter 8 on 'Crime, punishment and homelessness' finishes with the observation, 'it is clear that punitive vagrancy and anti-begging legislation and policies are not novel

11 For some reservations see Fitzpatrick and Watts (2010)

12 For background on these and related issues in the EU see: Edgar, Doherty, & Meert (2002)

[recent] but rather have a long history' (p. 93). In this long history much has changed, some things for the better, but the criminalisation and penalisation of homeless people continue unabated albeit under new guises (Chapters 8 & 10).

The above are all important insights but arguably the most important and fundamental advance in our understanding of the dynamics of homelessness as illustrated in this *Handbook* is that personal / individual problems are proportionately unrelated to the length of time people are likely to remain homeless and deprived of adequate housing. Rather it is the shortage of move-on housing and concomitantly the scarcity of permanent, secure accommodation that is the main obstacle.

Alongside – and in contrast to – the recording of 'advances', there is another discernible message that runs through the *Handbook* (though more often 'whispered' than 'proclaimed'); a message that cautions against hubris. Caution that arguably is very much needed as the mantra of 'ending homelessness' is promulgated by ever more programmes and policies (Finland has a lot to answer for). We know a lot about homelessness and will continue to learn and understand more about this fiendishly complex issue but presently as the continuing high levels of homelessness demonstrate the problem shows few signs of abating, let alone ending – this is a failure of purpose. Given these circumstances it is puzzling that in this *Handbook* there is so little coverage, other than fleeting commentary, of the role and impact of either the operation of the housing market or of prevention strategy, or of the links between them. Time and again the narratives and arguments presented in the *Handbook* point to the importance of both but in a fractured and isolated way. [13] A handbook which claims to be a reference and educational text is surely remiss in not facing these issues head on.

Historically prevention has long been part of the 'bread and butter' operations of most NGOs and charitable homelessness organisations in the form, for example, of outreach work with schools and youth organisations and legal support for benefit claimants and households threatened with eviction. The extent and intensity of this work being constrained by organisation finances and the availability of appropriately trained staff. In recent times prevention has taken on a more prominent role as evidenced in research publications (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2021; Mackie *et al*, 2017; Oudshoorn *et al*, 2020) and the inclusion of prevention planning in regional and national homelessness strategy development. The few discussions (barely more than a page in each case) of prevention in the *Handbook* mostly occur in the country profile chapters: Australia (Chapter 24), Canada (Chapter 25), Germany (Chapter29) and the UK (Chapter 38); additionally prevention warrants a separate section in the

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13 For example, the Third National Homelessness Plan in Finland, 2016-19 is almost entirely concerned with prevention. It is only mentioned in outline in one paragraph in the chapter on Finland (Chapter 28).

discussion of homelessness and social work in the EU (Chapter 8). Each of these demonstrates the increasing realisation – in the face of the 'failure' of housing-led programmes on their own to significantly tackle the level of homelessness – of the vital and critical role prevention plays, reinforcing the embedded truth in the undoubtedly overwork metaphor: 'while housing led programmes are disruptive of the revolving door of homelessness, prevention curtails the conveyor belt'.

Central to achieving these 'disruptive' and 'curtailment' objectives is a housing market [14] which at the very least needs to be responsive to the demand for low cost social housing and a properly regulated private rented sector. The constitution and operation of the housing market determines the social, political and economic context in which homelessness intensifies or abates. As intimated previously, evidence from virtually all the countries covered in the *Handbook* clearly shows that the main barrier to housing homeless people is ultimately the scarcity of permanent affordable housing. This is manifest in different ways from country to country: For instance, in the UK and some other European states, responsible authorities unable to meet their statutory duty of care to provide permanent housing for homeless people from their own housing stock, are increasingly reliant on hotels and an exploitative private rental sector for temporary, move-on accommodation (Nowicki, 2023), [15] while in the USA the shortage of permanent affordable accommodation is signalled by crowded shelters (Kerman et al, 2023) and burgeoning 'tent cities / homeless encampments' (Mitchell, 2020); and in Japan [16] (Hayashi, 2013) demeaning 'cyber homelessness' associated with '[inter]net and manga cafes' clearly exhibits similar problems. [17]

Caution regarding hubris is further emphasised in Pleace and Bretherton's concluding chapter (41) where they draw attention to the challenges and threats presented by 'neo-reactionism' – elsewhere known as 'The Dark Enlightenment' (Land, 2022) – to the prevailing zeitgeist regarding the causes and solutions of

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14 The plural, 'markets', is probably better. Even within the relatively limited geographic coverage of this *Handbook* at least three types of housing market can be identified – welfare, neo-liberal and command – all operating under often shared but sometimes divergent imperatives.

15 There is of course an irony here in that the concept and reality of 'move-on' and temporary housing is suggestive of the discredited 'staircase' sequence of housing-ready programmes.

16 Curiously not mentioned in the Japan chapter (No 33).

17 At the time of writing (April 2025) in a wholly unprecedented innovative move Edinburgh city councillors have approved the suspension of normal council housing letting policy to hypothecate, over a limited period, all available council property for people experiencing homelessness. In the last twelve months Edinburgh City Council has breached its statutory duty to provide accommodation on 3263 occasions, a rise of 115% over the previous year. https://homelessnetwork.scot/2025/04/28/response-to-edinburgh-suspension-of-council-housing-letting-policy/ [Accessed April 2025]

homelessness.[18] A version of neo-reactionism is currently being broadcast by the Trump regime in the USA and has purchase in some European countries particularly Hungary (Chapter 30) and has a public presence in, for example, Germany and the UK.[19] Pleace and Bretherton characterise neo-reactionism as 'an extremist, individualist, libertarian belief system' that espouses the 'total deregulation of markets… the removal or near removal of government' and 'the end to any sort of provision of public services including health, welfare and housing' (p. 437). Adopting this 'belief system' the Trump government is dismissive of housing-first and espouses a 'treatment-led approach' which translates into checking homeless people for mental health and addiction problems, thereby reinstating a crudely individualistic version of homelessness causation. The dismantling of the federal 'Interagency Council on Homelessness', one of Trump's first attacks on federal oversight of homelessness, has been followed by declarations of intent to remove all homeless people from the streets of American cities into (internment?) encampments.[20] These and comparable programmes for other spheres of public policy are integral to Project 2025, Trump's presidential transition programme compiled by the right wing Heritage Foundation set up during Reagan's presidency. The Heritage Foundation is but one of several right-wing think tanks dismissive of housing-first and championing the disbanding of government oversight of homelessness.[21]

With these issues in mind Pleace and Bretherton in the final paragraph of their *Handbook* diligently capture the provocations that presently confront homelessness, it is worth quoting in full:

> *Ultimately, this is the challenge for homelessness research [and praxis] to move away from distorted definitions and explanations and to address the forces that are reinforcing those narratives of individual pathology… centred on the alt-right and other far right movements. Recognition of the true nature and extent of homelessness is fundamental to this, that homelessness is an experience of women, children young people, migrant and ethnic minority populations, that it is an LGBTQI+ inequalities issue and that it does not exist in a single, narrow form, but is shaped by the culture, politics and welfare systems as well as by housing markets in individual cities, regions and countries.* (p.441)

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18 See also Pleace (2021)

19 The recently formed Great Britain PAC (Policy Action Committee) – which is closely linked with the Reform Party, though it claims links to a wider political base – is drawing up a schedule of 'action' plans for the UK 2029 general election (Shone, 2025); compare Trump's Project 2025.

20 https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-homelessness-response-forced-treatment/ [Accessed April 2025]

21 e.g. Cicero Institute: https://cicerogroup.com/homelessness/ & Manhattan Institute https://manhattan.institute/book/homelessness-in-america [Accessed May 2025]

Epistemic Provocations

In their final chapter, 'Homelessness Futures' the editors of the *Handbook* briefly reflect on Michele Lancione's work, suggesting that he has 'challenged many of the established, narratives, ideas and conventions of existing homelessness research' (p.440). Lancione's very first sentence in *Liberatory Politics* confirms that assessment:

> *What if the solution to* ***homelessness*** *is not* ***home****? What if home is not worth going back to, and one instead needs the construction of a more radical beyond? What kind of epistemic and material liberation is needed for thinking and doing that?* (p. vii)

Liberatory Politics is indeed a provocative and thoughtful book though – for this reviewer at least – also intermittently enigmatic. Lancione is an 'academic activist'. His impressive knowledge of the literature is firmly grounded in his familiarity with the realities of housing precarity acquired through his own ethnographic research and extensive political activity among homeless people in Italy and Romania. He is generous in his acknowledgement of his precursors (pp. 10-11)[22] and generally respectful of those he disagrees with – and he has many disagreements. Two are of particular relevance to this review.[23]

Lancione is no fan of housing-first. Or rather, while he sees housing-first as an improvement on housing-ready programmes, he still has consequential reservations. Lancione is also critical of what has been labelled the 'homelessness industry' (among which he explicitly identifies Feantsa and the European Observatory on Homelessness) for what these and other research and service organisations currently represent.[24]

In a typically revealing passage Lancione admits that initially he was supportive of housing-first, for example in producing a policy review for Shelter, one of the main homeless charities in the UK, and in celebrating housing-first's success in Finland in the company of the Y-Foundation, the agency largely responsible for implementing the programme. He is still of the opinion that it is 'a great improvement on any conditional model of sheltering' because it 'allows clients to extract something

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22 Additionally Lancione acknowledges the influence of 'radical grassroots organising', of 'queer thinking' and of 'feminist Black organising' (p.196 & *inter alia*).

23 *Liberatory Politics* is an extraordinary book replete with challenging argument and insight, regretfully too many to be considered in this already overlong review. Lancione also fashions and employs a new 'grammar of homelessness' the vocabulary of which "inhabitation", "lessness", "ritornello" for example need to be comprehended for a full appreciation of his exegesis. And familiarity with the work of Deleuze and Guattari would undoubtedly be useful.

24 For example, see the section ironically (?) labelled 'Loving the Poor' (pp 102-106). Full disclosure, I was a member and co-coordinator of the European Observatory, 1998-2008

substantive from the system… the benefit of stable abode and all that means in terms of personal security' (pp. 159 & 161). Initially, Lancione questioned housing-first on the pragmatic grounds of the managerial and structural impediments to implementing a programme designed in the USA in the very different social and political context of Europe; impediments which are for him still manifest when the strictures of fidelity to the original housing-first model are relaxed. Latterly, Lancione's view of housing-first has become more censorious. His critique is based on the conviction that to understand homelessness and other issues of housing precarity attention must 'look beyond the narrow domains of housing, homelessness or shelter to embrace wider material and cultural structures of power'.[25] From this perspective home and home(lessness), [26] traditionally seen as binary, are conceptually refashioned as mutually constitutive, embedded in a shared precarity. Housing-first may be an advance on housing-ready but 'being housed' comes with exposure to the vagaries of misogynist, racialised, classist and increasingly financialised housing markets that are fraught with difficulty and threat (or as Lancione often prefers 'violence') of disruption through domestic abuse, or eviction by rapacious landlords, mortgage default and gentrification: in these circumstances, as Lancione characterises it, 'home' contains the possibility of 'not being at home'; 'a house' is not a solution to 'homelessness' (passim).

Conversely, while the precarity of home(lessness) is all too evident – as for example detailed in the ethnographic stories recounted in *Liberatory Politics* – it can impart its own 'rewards' such as community solidarity, friendship and support. *Liberatory Politics* is here a little light on concrete examples, [27] historical or contemporary, but Lancione insists that throughout the book he 'draws from the experiences of housing movements round the globe to show that the fight for housing is more than a mere request for shelter' (p. 12).[28] Consistent with his methodology, Lancione references his own ethnographic narratives to illustrate the 'rewards' as well as the 'perils', the successes and as well as the travails of homeless people who, notwithstanding their precarious predicament, assert a degree of agency and control over 'home making'. This methodology is reflective also of a determination on Lancione's

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25 Quoted from publicity for a conference on 'The epistemic tangles of urban inhabitation'. University of Sheffield March 2024.

26 The parenthesis is Lancione's signal to readers that 'lessness' can be a shared attribute of the homed as well as those without a home.

27 For Lancione, *Liberatory Politics* is an 'epistemological exercise', a 'proposition', not a 'dogmatic operation' (p.197); he shies away from the programmatic – though parts of Chapter 6, 'The Micropolitics of Housing Precarity', come close.

28 There is a list (and no more) naming several social movements in a variety of geographical locations – Spain, Mexico, Chile, Eastern Europe, and USA – all 'challenging the unequal structural functioning of their homes… patriarchy, racism class exploitation and deprivation of shelter' in their fight for housing justice (p 176).

part to avoid what he identifies as the tendency, 'characteristic of conventional economy', to collapse 'experience into wider social facts and molar structuring.' (p.15; see also: pp.175-7 & pp.181-2)

In seeking to establish the ethos of a 'liberatory politics of home' Lancione references the work of John Turner and Martin Heidegger. Turner, an anarchist academic and architect active from the 1960s through the 1980s, was a prominent proponent of self-help housing and dweller control.[29] The title of his most well-known work *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in the Built Environment* (1976) reflecting and encapsulating these principles. Turner worked, alongside a local architect Eduardo Neira and others, in the rural villages and urban informal settlements in Peru and Chile. His ideas were co-opted by the World Bank in its 'site and service' schemes. Indeed the World Bank today continues to espouse self-help housing (though not so much dweller control) in developing countries. For Lancione it is the 'anarchist squatting scene' in Europe and elsewhere which reflects and enacts these Turneresque concepts: 'Squatters have embraced the idea that inhabitation [i.e. dwelling, as verb] should be defined by the ones doing it… if we are serious about instituting a ground for a space beyond home(lessness)… what counts is… its self-determining embodiment and sense of direction' (p. 217).[30]

Lancione justifies his engagement with 'the problematic thinker' Heidegger[31] on the grounds that he, Heidegger, is one of the few philosophers to have 'thought explicitly on dwelling' (p 180). It is Heidegger's notion of 'building as dwelling' (Heidegger, 1951) which specifically captures Lancione's interest. In elaborating the connection between 'building' (a material artifact) and dwelling' (inhabiting) Lancione is at his most metaphysical (following Heidegger) and somewhat difficult to interpret, but simplifying, hopefully not to the point of distortion: a building is more (or can be more) than a simple construction; as 'dwelling' it is a potential place of personal development, social connection and environmental harmony, 'a place /space for cherishing, protecting and caring' (p. 180). The implication here is that a progressive

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29 Michele Lancione's own anarchist proclivities are overt; he hosts a blog 'Tag: Anarchism'. https://www.michelelancione.eu/blog/tag/anarchism/ [Accessed May 2025]

30 See Harris (2003) for an evaluative overview of Turner's work. Burgess (1978) is more critical.

31 In 1933 on being appointed Rector of Freiburg University Heidegger joined the Nazi Party. Heidegger never renounced his party membership or challenged accusations of antisemitism. Heidegger's philosophical work is widely cited and discussed by many academics and other authors without reference to his political / antisemitic views.

reading of Heidegger's 'building as dwelling' is most likely conceived in circumstances where the 'liberatory politics' – which includes the 'material' as well as the 'epistemic'- of self-help and dweller control prevail.[32]

Lancione's critique of the 'homelessness industry'[33] – by which he means that 'broad spectrum of professionals and their institutions [social sciences and social services] working around homelessness' (p.11) – derives from his reformulation of home/home(lessness) as a unitary concept. The homeless industries are, Lancione argues, implicit in maintaining a binary interpretation which categorises homeless people as a 'separate entity' to be 'examined', 'segmented' and ''measured' by academics and other researchers, while the service sector is engaged in a management exercise controlling 'the other' according to the dictates of the prevailing political ideology. And while Lancione concedes housing-first might conceptually cut through some of this, the reality of its limited success apart from a very few notable cases, demonstrates to Lancione that housing-first is no panacea – homeless people are still marginalised and objectified as irritant to an otherwise apparently functioning society.

Clearly there is much to debate and contest. Indeed Lancione anticipates some of those objections by recreating a short 'imaginary' conversation between himself and potential critics (p.225-26). However, there is also much of value here and given the 'failure of purpose' encapsulated in the persistence and growth of homelessness across most jurisdictions and what can only be characterised as the 'wishful thinking' of ending homelessness emanating from both researchers and policy makers – Lancione definitely has a point.

Progressing through *Liberatory Politics* the question 'What is to be done?' becomes ever more pressing. Lancione tackles this in Part III and, as befits his sensibilities as an anarchist committed to 'affirmative action', proves to be more Tolstoy (1886) than Lenin (1901) – political economy perspectives (i.e. Lenin) are never overtly dismissed by Lancione but when mentioned are invariably conditioned (and thus belittled?) by the epithet 'conventional'.[34] In summary, Lancione's approach to the question of

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32 While investigating Heidegger I came across a paper which bears an uncanny resemblance to Lancione's own work, engaging with many of the same arguments and echoing the main message of *Liberatory Politics*. A quote illustrates:

'Specifically… I have inverted traditional reflections of homelessness: that the contemporary homeless have much to learn from the homeful. While this is certainly true, I have underscored something equally (or, more) important: that it is the homeful who have much to learn from the life of contemporary homelessness because the latter can help underline just how far the homeful perhaps are from authenticity'. Ranasinghe (2020, p. 214)

33 See Robles-Durán (2023) for a recent evaluation.

34 See pp.192-3 in *Liberatory Politics* for an eloquent summary of Lancione's radical epistemology.

'what's to be done?' involves a three-part sequential process. First, *deinstitution*: achieved through 'deinstitutionalising and fighting against the industries responsible for caring for the "other" of home, which includes much of the of the current service provision for the homeless, as well as the knowledge production around them'. Second, *reinstitution*: achieved through 'radical caring', that is, 'relearning how to care for inhabitation [i.e. dwelling as verb] and its struggles and to constitute on that basis a universal approach to housing based on dweller control'. Third, *institution*: achieved 'through affirmation' which is focused on considering occupation [i.e. squatting] and grassroots organising as an alternative to interventions focused on policy change'. (Chapters 6 & 7, summarised on p. 18)

In his response to a recent fulsome review of *Liberatory Politics* in Urban Studies (McFarlane *et al*, 2025) Lancione reacts to the observation that his book does not offer much in terms of mid-ground policy reforms by restating, in more provocative terms, the first of the above actions, *deinstitution*:

> *'… dismantling and ridiculing the business of homelessness studies and knowledge production… [R]ather than openly tackling the root causes of the problem – a home founded on racial financial heteronormative capitalism – those 'homelessness industries' produce the specialist parcellation of misery, which.… at best provides relief but surely does not offer liberation… From my situated position within the Academy, that is the big-sweep reform I would like to see: to counter the senseless production of policy recommendations based on what one might call 'scientific othering', and, from there, to* ***instantiate a renewed epistemology of homing****.* (Lancione, in McFarlane, 2025, p. 797)

Theoretical provocations

At the outset Don Mitchell clearly states the objective of *Mean Streets*:

> *[to bring] together in a single, sustained argument a theory of the social and economic logic behind the historic development, evolution and especially the persistence of homelessness in the contemporary city – and how that persistence is fundamentally related to the way capital works in the urban built environment, and thus to the structure, function, meaning, use and governance of urban public space* (p. vii)

This is a bold and ambitious aspiration, but one rooted in Mitchell's thirty years of researching homelessness and public space in the American city. Over seven chapters Mitchell argues that homelessness is neither the result of individual life choices or individual impediments, *nor* the consequence of structural negligence or systemic failure (though these are included in his analysis). On the contrary, for

Mitchell homelessness is 'a condition of society, not a characteristic of individuals' (p.31); it is fundamental to the operation of the capitalist mode of production.

In demonstrating the legitimacy of these claims Mitchell presents us with a materialist and provocative analysis of the interplay between urban geography, homelessness, public space and anti-homeless legislation. Central to this analysis is the Marxian concept of the 'reserve army of labour.'[35] This reserve – comprising the unemployed, the underemployed and those who are actively seeking work – coexists with the functioning economy of the employed as a constituent part of the working class.[36] The reserve army has a periodic, dual role: first, as 'a pool' of labour to be called upon in times of production expansion and, second, as a consequence of 'the pool's' availability for work, to exert downward pressure when profit is threatened by wage demands from those in employment.[37] Homelessness is an entrenched characteristic of the reserve army. However, while periodically useful to capitalism, this combination of unemployment and homelessness also throws up an incongruity particularly when the underemployed and unemployed homeless claim the streets and public spaces of urban capitalism as their dwelling place – for, as Mitchell notes, 'survival, companionship and pleasure' (p.169) – thereby potentially disrupting the 'normal' functioning of public space as a 'site' for consumption (shopping, entertainment etc) and for productive potential (investment in the built environment etc). Arguably this is the contradiction that lies at the heart of *Mean Streets*.[38]

Mean Streets has an intricate structure in which basic themes and arguments, introduced early in the text, are built upon and progressively developed historically and conceptually to unravel Michell's theory regarding the development and the persistence of homelessness in the American city. Mitchell fittingly identifies the principal issues (p xii) in each of the book's three sections. Part 1 presents a fascinating (albeit abbreviated) historical account of homelessness in the USA – tracing its roots to the birth of European capitalism and charting its growth through the 'skid rows' of the 1900s to the 'tent cities/encampments' of the 2000s. Mitchell

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35 Otherwise referred to as 'the industrial reserve army' or 'the relative surplus population'. The similarity between Marx's 'reserve army' and Craig Willse's 'surplus population' (Willse, 2015) – the latter cited and praised by Lancione – is superficial: Marx's 'surplus' is an active and necessary component of capitalism, Willse's 'surplus', while a product of capitalism, has no equivalent 'active' role; it is akin to Wacquant's 'Outcasts' (2008).

36 Though not explicitly referenced in *Mean Streets*, a further category, the lumpenproletariat, is sometimes included in the reserve army. In Marxist theory, the lumpenproletariat consists of people who are marginalized and often excluded from employment surviving through informal forms of subsistence (e.g. begging) that don't directly contribute to the capitalist economy. Given the ostensible overlap between the lumpenproletariat and some categories of homelessness its absence from *Mean Streets* is surprisingly unexplained.

37 For a recent example of this process at work see: Prendergast (2020)

38 Capitalism is of course rife with contradictions: see e.g. Harvey (2014)

argues that this historical knowledge is 'vital for understanding the present moment… through it we begin to draw a complete and especially a logical picture of the relationship… between the structural nature of homelessness and the problematic necessity of public space'. (p. xi)

A theoretical exegesis on the changed and changing patterns of circulation and accumulation of capital in the built environment follows Part 1. In this 'Interlude' (a stand-alone unnumbered chapter placed in the middle of the book) Mitchell, citing the work of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey among others, introduces concepts such as 'abstract space' and 'compound interest' in charting the shift from capitalism's 'industrial' focus in the time of Marx to the 'urban' context of late capitalism where speculation and investment in the 'built environment' operates alongside 'the factory' in producing value. Mitchell also uses this 'Interlude' chapter to mark the transition in his book from a focus on homelessness per se to a focus on public space and its increasing regulation – suggesting that open space has in effect become a misnomer; today it's less about 'openness' than about 'social control'.

Part 2 focuses explicitly on the interrelationship between homelessness and public space. Through a scripting of the increasing regulation and control of public space by law, Mitchell here proffers the concept of 'metastasising' – how in the USA anti-homeless and related ordinances have spread (cancer-like) from city to city, creating a hostile urban environment not only for homeless people but for a wider population. Until recently this might have been seen as one of Mitchell's the more debatable assertions but Donald Trump's infliction of 'ICE' (USA's Immigration and Custom Enforcement Agency) and 'Doge' (Department of Government Efficiency) on the people of the USA has changed all that.

Mean Streets – as Mitchell fully acknowledges – delivers a pessimistic message. Echoing Friederic Engels (1872) Mitchell asserts that 'capitalism has no solution to homelessness but to push it around and change its form… if we want to abolish homelessness, we must abolish capitalism'. (p. 160) This inability to 'solve' the problem of homelessness illustrates the 'limits to capitalism' referred to in the title of the book.

Yet, as his autobiographical notes (*Afterward*, pp. 157– 62) suggest, there is something of Gramsci's '*pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will*' about Mitchell's own views of the present and future. As a young man growing up in the USA in close proximity to burgeoning homelessness in west coast cities, Mitchell was at first puzzled then enraged – to the extent that he has spent a considerable part of his academic life studying the subject. The puzzlement has long since disappeared, but the rage has not abated – he is 'still angry after all these years'. And

fuelled by that anger he continues to research and write and campaign.[39] Yet Mitchell is no absolutist. Capitalism may be the problem, but along with Lancione, Mitchell is forthright in acknowledging that the deprivations of homelessness can and have been alleviated – housing-first has been beneficial for individuals and he specifically recognises the substantial improvement in the housing of previously homeless US veterans (p.28 & 150).

The end of homelessness?

In the light of the preceding reviews, the 'zeitgeist' as outlined at the beginning of this essay is looking a bit frazzled, but just about holding its own. Certainly for those of a 'liberal' persuasion, namely contributors to the *Handbook,* [40] there appears to be general acceptance of the causation narrative and housing-led paradigm. The 'anarchist' (Lancione) and 'marxist' (Mitchell) viewpoints are more antithetical specifically with regard to the long term efficacy of the housing-led approach. While both Lancione and Mitchell concede that housing-led is an advance on housing-ready they are convinced that housing-led does not deserve approbation as the route to ending homelessness.

Ending homeless strategies and programmes, national and city based, have a 20+ year history. Some have claimed success particularly in reducing rough sleeping (though frequently only temporarily) and with targeted groups such as veterans in the USA, but none – with the possible exception of Finland – have come close (even when employing the 'deception' of functional zero)[41] to eliminating homelessness across the board. Finland however has undoubtedly achieved amazing success and homelessness continues to decline.

The lessons from Finland, whose achievements are as exceptional as they are extraordinary, identify the range of issues and the level of coordination that is required for a successful assault on homelessness: the administrative and policy alignment of central government, local government and a national homelessness implementing agency (the Y foundation) to a housing-led/housing-first programme; the garnering of political will and public support; a pre-existing advanced social welfare system; and the commitment of significant and sufficient capital (monetary and political) for the provision of non-profit affordable social housing and the

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39 See for example: https://www.liberationschool.org/homelessness-public-space-and-the-limits-to-capital-an-interview-with-don-mitchell/ [Accessed May 2025]

40 Assigning one label 'Liberal' to 45 authors is a bit of a 'liberty' – apologies for any unintended offence.

41 See: Hartman, P. (2015) 'The "Functional Zero" Fallacy'. Housing the Homeless https://housethehomeless.org/the-functional-zero-fallacy/ [Accessed June 2025]. See also Grainger (2024)

delivery of supporting services. It also helps that in a relatively large country (by land area 7th in Europe) Finland has a small population of 5.6 million, 30 percent of whom live in the relatively confined geographic space of the Helsinki metropolitan area. This 'fortuitous' combination of circumstances contrasts with Finland's neighbour, Denmark – also a country with a small population and advanced welfare provision but where attempts at ending homelessness have been less successful.[42] Lars Benjaminsen (author of the chapter on Denmark in the *Handbook*) records that – while individual homeless people and families have benefited – over the two phases of an ending homelessness programme neither the overall target of reducing homelessness, nor the specific targets of reducing rough sleeping and the closure of long-term shelters have been met. Benjaminsen identifies several factors which explain these shortfalls ranging from problems in administrative coordination with and between central government and those municipalities that chose to engage with the programme, to a critical lack of affordable housing plus difficulties in providing sufficient intensive social support services (Benjaminson, p.304 in Bretherton & Pleace, 2023).

While celebration of Finland's achievements are entirely appropriate some admonitory observations are in order. Saija Turunen and Riitta Granfelt in their *Handbook* chapter on Finland suggest that there is work still to be done before an end of homelessness accolade can be awarded. They note for example that the inclusion of at-risk women as an established part of housing services is 'still a work in progress' and that high level substance users are still 'living on the margins'. They further observe that '[m]arket-driven competitive tendering has resulted in situations where support services have been implemented with limited resources and have proved insufficient to secure housing for everyone in need.' (Turunen and Granfelt, p.314 in Bretherton and Pleace, 2023)

For the most part elegantly written and full of humanity, end of homelessness proposals are enthusiastic, ambitious and appealing – yet lacking in evidence – indeed such evidence as there is suggests that all such plans, particularly when completion dates are added, fall well short of stated expectations. For example, in 2010 the US Interagency Council on Homelessness identified several ambitious objectives: ending veteran homelessness by 2015, ending chronic homelessness by 2017 and family homelessness by 2020. With the investment of significant resources progress was made in all these objectives – particularly on veteran homelessness – but 'ending' was not one of them. In 2021 the EU's Lisbon Declaration established the 'European Platform for Combatting Homelessness' (EPOCH) with the declared intention of ending rough sleeping, preventing discharge into homelessness, curtailing evictions and ending discrimination by 2030. With

42 See Allen *et al* (2010) for further detail.

only 5 years to go the evidence again clearly suggests that these targets will not be met, indeed homeless continues to increase in virtually all member states (See Footnote 3).

In seeking an explanation for the failure to curb the recurrence and persistence of homelessness let alone 'end it', the lack of sufficient affordable and secure permanent housing stands out as the fundamental impediment – on this the authors of the three books reviewed in this essay seem to agree. A disappointment of the *Handbook* is that while this issue is frequently intimated it is not addressed directly in relation to how this 'shortage' is to be resolved other than with passing references to 'the need' for rent controls, municipal and non-profit housing. The *Handbook*, as noted earlier, conspicuously provides no critique of the paramountcy of commodified /for-profit housing markets that control and inhibit the process of housing production. Lancione and Mitchell have important differences with each other, but both argue that under the prevailing forms of economic and social regulation there is no resolution to homelessness. They might agree that de-commodification of the housing market is essential but only truly liberating when embedded in wider battle against precarity, misogyny, racism and stigma. In this context Mitchell's observations are instructive:

> Holding to the principle that '*to abolish homelessness we need to abolish capitalism'* does not mean *'that all manner of interventions into homelessness – creating shelter, defining encampments, providing real, needed psychological support, abolishing the prison system – are not necessary… [r]ather it means imagining and working towards a world of abundance in which the general law of capital accumulation simply does not operate'.* (p.160)

Managing and mitigating homeless may not be enough, but in the meantime…

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