In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

Essays in honour of Henk Meert 1963-2006

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This volume is a celebration of the life and work of Henk Meert. The principal authors of six of the chapters were members of the European Observatory on Homelessness during the period of Henk’s leadership (2001-2006). The final two chapters are hitherto unpublished papers written by Henk and his co-authors.

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Memories of Henk

More than two years have gone by since Henk passed away unexpectedly. In FEANTSA, we all have warm and happy memories of the time he was involved in the work of the European Observatory on Homelessness. With this publication we would like to pay tribute to Henk and thank him for the significant contribution he made to the success of FEANTSA’s research work.

The importance of Henk’s work for FEANTSA and for the European fight against homelessness cannot be underestimated. He was perhaps not the most high-profile member of FEANTSA, but he was definitively one of the most effective. I would like to share with you some of FEANTSA’s success stories in which Henk played a key part.

Henk is one the people responsible for the origins of ETHOS – FEANTSA’s definition of homelessness. He was convinced of the importance of having clear concepts and definitions for effective policies, especially at EU level. Henk very quickly realised that people involved in FEANTSA were referring to very different realities when discussing homelessness, and that this was detrimental to the quality of FEANTSA’s work. For Henk, a clear definition of homelessness was a necessary condition for useful transnational work. But he never slipped into endless academic discussions about the scientific foundation of the definition. The result is a clear and practical definition of homelessness, which is being taken up by policy makers, researchers, and NGOs from across Europe. It is a shame that Henk only witnessed the beginning of the ‘triumphal march’ of ETHOS in Europe.

Few people are aware of the difficulties we went through to reach an agreement on a definition in FEANTSA. It required the patience of a saint. And in contrast to some people involved in the discussions, Henk was very patient. I remember very clearly how Henk, together with Bill Edgar and a set of clear arguments, calmly responded to the criticism – it was actually always the same criticism – on the proposed definition. It took more than five years of perseverance to reach the end result and a great deal of thanks go to Henk. FEANTSA is now one of the few European social NGOs which had the courage to define the issue which it works on in considerable detail.

Adding Henk to the Observatory team of coordinators was one of the best decisions FEANTSA has ever made. Henk teamed up very well with Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty. Together they were able to steer the European Observatory to adopt
several and quite drastic reforms. Henk’s ability to argue for a fair balance between the interest of the academics and the members of FEANTSA helped enormously in the process of turning the Observatory into a smooth running research network producing high quality work. What a pity that he did not get the chance to witness the new structure and working methods of the Observatory. His vision and enthusiasm will certainly be missed.

Henk also played an important role in the strategic development FEANTSA. Together with the other members of the coordinating team of the Observatory he helped to raise the profile of research in FEANTSA. We spent a lot of time – especially after working hours – discussing the future of the organisation. FEANTSA’s decision to focus on data collection as a primary issue of concern, engage more in EU commissioned research, and bring FEANTSA researchers in more direct contact with EU policy makers, were to a great extent the results of our nightly discussions.

All members of the Observatory will agree that working with Henk was a very pleasant experience. His comments during meetings were always constructive, he had great respect for researchers and FEANTSA members involved in research, and his dry sense of humour helped us get through the sometimes long and demanding meetings. We were all impressed by his refreshing take on academic research. His perspectives on homelessness as a social geographer were always very interesting and often quite challenging. The research he coordinated for FEANTSA on the role of the media and on the profile of rough sleeping are good examples of his creative style of working.

I also personally enjoyed working with Henk and I learnt a great deal from him. We did not see each other very often, but the regular long working weekends abroad forged a special bond between us. He gave me valuable insight into the world of research and helped me to understand the importance of evidence-based policies and the role of research within that.

Most of us were aware of Henk’s health problems although he never made an issue of them. I was quite often concerned about the impact of his work schedule on his health and we regularly spoke about it. But he always seemed to be in full control. That is why his sudden death came as all the more of a surprise to us.

It was really good that I had the chance to work with you Henk. Thanks a lot.

Freek Spinnewijn
Introduction

Henk’s tragic and untimely death has robbed us all of a fine friend and an inspirational colleague. In everything he did – in his family, in his community and in his academic life – his integrity and fight for social justice were clearly evident. An astute and critical observer, Henk had an established and acclaimed academic reputation in the study of poverty and social exclusion, housing segregation and homelessness. Here, as in so many other activities, his sensitivity to exploitation and deprivation, and his commitment in striving for fair and equitable treatment of those excluded from mainstream society were clearly manifest. Henk saw no division between his academic work and everyday life where his commitment to social justice was also demonstrably evident: Henk was hugely influential, socially and politically, in his local community of Pajottenland as an active campaigner for fair trade and for the promotion of organic farming and wind energy.¹

We first met Henk at the 2000 European Housing Research Network in Gävle, Sweden at which he presented a paper from which we have derived the title for this memorial book. “In my caravan, I feel like superman”² recounts Henk’s observations on people whose housing opportunities in Belgium were so limited that their temporary residence in caravans often became permanent housing solutions. Over lunch and coffee he educated us about the work of Jacque Brel (from one of whose songs this line came). His paper impressed with its academic rigour but, more importantly, with the conviction and integrity that came across when he spoke of the people who were living permanently on campsites across Belgium.

In 2001 Henk accepted an invitation as a visiting scholar at the Department of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Dundee and agreed to join us as a co-ordinator of the European Observatory on Homelessness. His valued contribution in that role is clearly evident in the two books³ and numerous EOH research publica-


tions 4 which he authored or co-authored. In addition, Henk made a valuable contribution to the conceptual model of the ETHOS typology on homelessness and housing exclusion. His role as co-ordinator of the Working Group on Profiling Homelessness was valued by his working group colleagues and led to significant contributions to our understanding of the perception of homelessness in the media and in the control of public spaces both of which themes are represented in this volume.

This book is a small testimony to the high regard in which he is held by all those who worked with him in the Observatory. The chapters are written by those who knew and respected Henk and his commitment to social justice and reflect many of the academic and personal interests that he pursued.

In Chapter 1, Pascal de Decker, Christian Kesteloot and Caroline Newton examine Flemish housing policies which, they argue, make it ever more difficult for the poor to find adequate housing. They are critical of long-term policies which aim to stimulate home-ownership based on a ‘blind faith’ in the trickle down effects of the market to benefit poorer households. This focus on ownership and reliance on the market has led successive governments to neglect the need for an efficient social housing policy. This concern for affordable housing for poor and vulnerable households is well captured by Henk in Chapter 3 of our jointly authored book “Access to Housing” (see footnote 3)

In Chapter 2, Volker Busch-Geertsema argues that exclusion from public spaces in Germany (and elsewhere in Europe) restricts the “right to the city” for socially marginalised groups. He describes the effects of a general tendency for privatisation to convert public spaces to semi-public and private domains and contribute to the exclusion of homeless and poor people from inner city areas. The causes of this trend are complex and the homeless are not the main targets of the most exclusionary strategies, but they are among the victims especially if they sleep rough. This issue was introduced to the work of the Observatory by Henk as a key theme of the Working Group profiling homelessness in their 2006 report and has been reproduced here in edited form as Chapter 8.

Isobel Anderson worked with Henk in co-ordinating the workgroup on Welfare Policy, Homelessness and Housing Exclusion for the European Network of Housing Research (ENHR) from 2004 to 2006. A successful first meeting at the ENHR conference in Cambridge, UK (2004) was followed by workshops in Reykjavik, Iceland (2005) and Ljubljana, Slovenia (2006). Isobel’s chapter here presents empirical findings from research in the UK on the impact of legislative change on young people (defined as those aged 16-24) who experience homelessness. Research since the early 1990s, in the UK, has consistently shown that young people are overrepresented among homeless households and that there are distinct risks and pathways associated with youth homelessness. Although recent legislative change has the potential to improve the housing and support outcomes for many vulnerable young people who experience homelessness, only a relatively small proportion of young people can be shown to be better off under the new regulations. The explanation for this slow and gradual process of change which still leaves many young people vulnerable to homelessness is complex. In part the lack of knowledge about their rights among young people can be a key factor. However, the implementation gap between legislative intentions and a slow change in administrative procedures leaves most young people falling on the wrong side of a rationing process.

In Chapter 4 Eoin O’Sullivan elaborates on the contribution made by Henk and Marie Bourgeois 5 to our understanding of the pathways through homelessness. Eoin reminds us that in that article Henk and Marie focus on the agency perspective (the motivations and objectives of homeless people) and related this to structure and institutional factors which have shaped the mobility of homeless people. Their paper provides a theoretical framework that allows for a focus on dimensions of homelessness which should be of central concern to policy makers:

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how individuals exit homelessness. Eoin’s paper reviews the literature to suggest – in a way that complements Henk and Marie’s analysis -that individuals, rather than experiencing a progressive decline in housing circumstances, can move into and out of homelessness at different stages in their life cycles. He notes that a number of distinctive strands of research with competing theoretical and methodological approaches are discernible. This chapter highlights the importance of Henk’s innovative, insightful and conceptual approach to the difficult issue of the geography of homeless pathways.

Henk’s interest in urban planning, segregation and the operation of the informal economy are reflected in Ingrid Sahlin’s contribution on urban definitions of places and people (Chapter 5). In her essay, Ingrid argues that the interaction of city renewal, public-private partnerships and zero tolerance in urban policing has serious implications for the homeless who may be excluded from commercial and cultural centres both deliberately and unintentionally. She employs concepts of border control and discipline to make sense of the different strategies of landlords and the local authorities. She concludes that the coming together of private interests and public authorities in determining the goals of urban renewal, including the definition of rights, rules and purpose of urban spaces, have conspired to the detriment of homeless and disadvantaged groups.

The contribution of Srna Mandić and Maša Filipović Hrast (Chapter 6) reflects Henk’s interest in housing and homelessness in the new member states of the EU and other central European countries. Srna and Masa examine homelessness in the context of the ‘transitional housing reforms’ which transpired following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Using Slovenia as a case study, they assess the impact of housing reforms on the structural causes of homelessness. Srna and Masa identify an early period in the transition process that led to increasing housing vulnerability and strengthened the structural causes of homelessness, while at the same time not recognising or ignoring this vulnerability in the policy context; this lack of recognition changed gradually only in the second decade of transition. In his study of the informal economy and living situations of poor households in Brussels, Henk developed a typology of coping strategies based on the economic integration theory of Polanyi, which employed the concepts of reciprocity, redistribution and market relations. The analysis presented by Srna and Masa echo this understanding. They argue that governments have increasingly tended to rely on emerging housing market mechanisms, while the measures to regulate them are still embryonic. At the same time a variety of new social risks have emerged, such as unemployment, poverty and housing vulnerability in a ‘free’ housing market which is not yet properly regulated to protect the consumer.
The final two chapters are papers prepared by Henk in collaboration with other academics. Chapter 7 is a hitherto unpublished paper written in collaboration with Karen Stuyck, a paper Henk was working on at the time of his death. In this chapter Henk with Karen presents a study of Les Marolles, a gentrifying district of inner Brussels in which they challenge the appropriateness of applying Neil Smith’s notion of the ‘revanchist city’, developed in relation to urban USA, to the cities of Europe. A close observer of changing urban landscapes, Henk consistently argued that theory is contingent on context. This study tentatively deploys the notion of ‘disciplining urbanism’ as a counter to ‘revanchism’ – a more subtle, but not necessarily less effective, set of mechanisms and instruments by which urban regeneration transforms poor urban communities to the detriment of incumbent residents.

Chapter 8 is an edited and shortened version of a 2006 report prepared by a working group of the Observatory under Henk’s direction. The topic of this contribution reflects two of Henk’s interests. First, the use of public spaces by roofless people and the conflict this engenders with property owners and public authorities, and secondly the public perception of homelessness and its portrayal in the media. The report focused on three questions: First, which public spaces and places are typically used by homeless people, and why; secondly, how homeless people perceive public space; and finally, the degree and nature of conflict experienced in their use of public space. It is a testament to Henk’s skill as a research coordinator that he conceived of and directed this research across eight European countries: seven European member states – the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, Hungary, Belgium – and Norway. Typically Henk, with the collaboration of his co-authors, went beyond a simple recounting of the evidence to deliver precise and shrewd social and political judgments on the observed trends of growing exclusion and emerging conflicts and to reflect on the policy implications for those agencies of the state responsible for landuse planning and social control.

It is with great sadness that we mourn the departure of our esteemed colleague and personal friend. We trust readers will find this collection of essays interesting and stimulating and that they will give you a small insight into the interests that guided Henk’s life and his academic contribution to issues of social justice and homelessness.

Joe Doherty and Bill Edgar
November 2008
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman
Where are vulnerable people to live in a State obsessed with homeownership?

Pascal De Decker¹, Christian Kesteloot² and Caroline Newton³

Introduction

In this chapter we examine the position of the poor in the Flemish housing market and look at the impact of housing policies that might improve their situation. Basically, the argument is that the choices made by the Flemish government with regard to housing policy make it ever more difficult for the poor to find adequate housing, partly because policies are no longer adapted to changed social and economic circumstances.

On January 1st 1994, the right to decent housing was formally inscribed in the Belgian constitution. Nevertheless – despite the rhetoric – Belgian and Flemish governments have only a small role to play in the realisation of housing rights. As a consequence, market transactions between private agents dominate (Table 1); only 7% of housing transactions concern social rental housing, and are not determined by the market. In all other cases, market relations between sellers and buyers and between landlords and tenants determine house prices without government interference. The market process is considered as an effective instrument determining the best possible allo-

¹ Hogeschool Gent & Hogeschool WenK, Sint-Lucasarchitectuurschool Gent/Brussels
² Instituut voor Sociale en Economische Geografie Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
³ Hogeschool Gent & Hogeschool WenK, Sint-Lucasarchitectuurschool Gent/Brussel & Erasmus Hogeschool Brussels
⁴ In the Belgian federal state, housing policy is a regional matter. Nevertheless, the legal framework for the private rental sector is still decided at the national level, as well as a large part of housing fiscal policy. In this paper, we focus on the Flemish case.
cation of the housing stock; matching supply and demand. Moreover, it is believed that homeownership offers the best guarantee for decent housing. Table 2 shows that homeownership has continuously increased over the last 20 years and now reaches 74%. Conversely, private renting has declined relatively and in absolute numbers. But precisely because poor people tend to concentrate in the private rental sector, its shrinking in both absolute and relative terms has severe consequences.

Table 1: Flanders: Estimate of transactions on the housing market, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private rent</td>
<td>51.660</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social rent</td>
<td>9.495</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale dwellings</td>
<td>63.902</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale building lots</td>
<td>13.907</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138.964</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: De Decker (2006)

Table 2: Flanders, occupied dwellings by market segment, 1980-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>1,275,639</td>
<td>1,492,210</td>
<td>1,668,360</td>
<td>130.7</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rental</td>
<td>573,991</td>
<td>534,304</td>
<td>464,989</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social rental *</td>
<td>98,315</td>
<td>115,043</td>
<td>125,905</td>
<td>128.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>18,481</td>
<td>29,001</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,961,481</td>
<td>2,141,557</td>
<td>2,259,254</td>
<td>115.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* rented by social housing companies, thus excluding housing rented by social rental agencies and by municipalities. In 2001 the total number of non-market rented dwellings was 139,171 (see Vanneste, 2007)
** Goossens et al., 1991
*** based on census data and reports from the Flemish Housing Society (VHM). Census data do not include the non response

In what follows, we analyse each of the housing market segments and their policy trends whilst also focusing on their consequences for the poor and vulnerable people. To start we briefly sketch the state of poverty in Flanders and the housing conditions of the poor. Section 2 looks at homeownership, which has been seen by successive regional governments as the main solution to housing problems. Section 3 focuses on social housing and Section 4 on private renting where the problems of poor households are the most acute. We consider the need for a shift in policies in the concluding section.
Poverty and housing in Flanders: an overall picture

According to the most recent analysis of the European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), in 2006 11.4% of the Flemish population lived in poverty; in Belgium as a whole it was 14.7% (Vranken et al, 2008). Ending up in poverty is linked to age (with higher risk for people above 65), to work (with higher risk for unemployed and pensioners) and to household structure (with especially one-income households at risk of poverty). With respect to housing, poor people tend to live more often in rental units. These dwellings are of a far lower quality if they belong to the private rental sector, compared to other housing tenures within the same price range (De Decker et al, 2005; Heylen et al, 2007). Additionally tenants are far more likely to be poor than owners (Table 3). One out of three poor people indicate they have difficulties in adequately heating their dwelling. Also, their houses are relatively less comfortable in comparison to the more affluent population; they have less space and fewer elementary amenities, and more of them indicate that their dwellings are dark and gloomy (FOD Economie, 2008).

Table 3: The poor and their housing conditions in Belgium 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Poor population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rental dwelling</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 room/persons</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems for heating</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No elementary comfort</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark and gloomy housing</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FOD Economie

A way of linking poverty and housing is to compare housing costs with subsistence income benefit5 (Table 4). It shows that, unless they were owners before falling into poverty, income benefit holders have virtually no access to the main segment of the housing market6 and that they are on a very tight budget if they are not in the tiny social housing sector. The exercise done in Table 4 tells us (i) that access to homeownership for people on a subsistence income is not possible, (ii) that private renting is expensive relative to income and (iii) that social renting is the most affordable.

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5 This benefit was created in 1974 and was seen as the final step in the national social security. The amount of benefit is supposed to cover the minimal costs for a decent life. In the wake of postfordist welfare state reforms, it is now called “leefloon” or literally “living wage” and subject to a contractual acceptance to search for employment.

6 Fortis, the mortgage market leader, excludes households from their market if they retain less than 750€ per month to live from after paying the instalment (De Decker, 2005a).
Table 4: Flanders: housing costs versus subsistence income benefit, estimate for 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monthly housing costs (€)</th>
<th>Housing costs as % of single person benefit</th>
<th>Residual monthly income (€)</th>
<th>Housing costs as % of family benefit</th>
<th>Residual monthly income (€)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private rent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- average rent (CSB) *</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- average rent (housing budget survey)**</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- average social rental agencies***</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social rent°</strong></td>
<td>207</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purchase +</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. average house (€170.507)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- cheapest mortgage</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>-214</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 20 years fixed</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>-507</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>-298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. average apartment (€143.591)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- cheapest mortgage</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>-82</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 20 years fixed</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>-328</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>-120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Van Dam & Geurts (2000); Pannecoucke e.a. (2003).
** Winters & Marchal (2004)
*** VOB (2006)
° VHM (2005)
* Simulation on www.fortis.be (on 16 Aug. 2006) with 100% mortgage – the cheapest tariff is for a 30 years mortgage with yearly adjustment; housing prices from De Tijd Vastgoedgids 2006

Poverty and homeownership: an impossible relation

Access to home-ownership requires substantial financial outlays: the average monthly instalment is roughly four times the average social rent and two to three times the average private rent. Van Damme & Winters (2002) estimate that less than half of Flemish households have an income which would enable them to finance a 20 year mortgage for the purchase of an average dwelling.

Nevertheless 75% of the Flemish households are owner-occupiers, which the SILC survey claims includes about 5.4% of poor households. This rather surprising fact has several explanations. First, Fordist, post-war economic development took shape very early in Belgium. The state-led agreements between employers and
Where are vulnerable people to live...?  

Trade unions guaranteed both income security and regular increases in income. The welfare state developed financial safety nets in case of unemployment, illness, and old age. Moreover, houses are relatively affordable in Belgium, compared with neighbouring countries (ERA, 2003/2004) and low interest rates and thus cheap loans have enabled many people within the population to become homeowners (Meulemans et al, 1996; Van Dam & Geurts, 2000; Heylen et al, 2007).

However, the most persistent explanation for the high share of owner-occupiers is government policy. Belgian governments have promoted home-ownership unilaterally since end of the 19th century and when housing policy was devolved to the Regions in the 1970s, the Flemish government didn’t change that course of action. Governments have used a broad range of subsidy schemes in order to promote and sustain homeownership. State guaranteed loans with reduced interest rates, subsidies for the purchase of dwellings at reduced prices, construction and renovation grants, tax exemptions and an insurance scheme are the main instruments of this policy. Such state intervention has reinforced the deep aspirations of Flemish households to become homeowners.

Yet, this apparently successful policy is not beyond criticism. Its efficiency has been called into question (Deleeck et al, 1983; De Decker, 2001). Others argue, contrary to what protagonists believe, that such demand subsidies do not facilitate access to ownership, but fuel house price inflation, since more money than expected enters an inflexible market. The pervasive ambition of homeownership increases the tensions between these aspirations and the financial realities. The high level of homeownership is achieved through a substantial degree of self-construction (Peeters & De Decker, 1997) and important intergenerational transfers (Doms e.a., 2001; De Decker, 2007; Heylen et al., 2007). Moreover, large numbers of owner-occupied dwellings are of poor quality and their owners lack the money for the necessary refurbishment. Flanders has in absolute numbers – using the criteria of dwelling age and availability of basic amenities – more deficient owner occupied housing (412,676) than private rental housing (160,811) (De Decker & Laureys, 2006). Finally, every year a few thousand households fail to pay their mortgage instalments and lose their homes (De Decker & Geurts, 2003).

More profoundly, the essential feature of most of these housing subsidy schemes is that, even if aspirant owners get a subsidy or a combination of them, they have to finance the largest share of the housing costs from their own income. Deleeck et al (2003) calculated that the centrepiece of the post-war Belgian housing policy, the De Taeye grant (the main purchase subsidy introduced in 1948), accounts for no more than 4% of average housing investment. Aspirant homeowners thus have to rely on their own means, be it savings, gifts, but especially their wages.
Fundamentally, the realisation of homeownership is linked to the labour market and thus to employment. Housing rights in Belgium, even if they are guaranteed on paper by the constitution, are in fact dependent on the wage economy.

Another aspect, which has a direct effect on the housing conditions of the poor, is a shortage of new dwellings. This is crucial in understanding current housing problems. With the focus on individual homeownership, governments discharged themselves from supporting the development of a voluntary housing sector (this explains the low share of social housing) and as a result, the overall housing construction levels reflect the economic basis and the income available to householders rather than the real housing needs. The number of housing units per person is therefore lower than in other European countries (Feddes, 1995; VCB, 2008 – see Table 5). There follows a deficit in terms of good and affordable dwellings. The idea behind the 1948 De Taeye grant was this filtering theory (Goossens, 1983): households moving to newly built houses vacate decent dwellings which then become available for those previously living in slums. But construction activity was never sufficient to eliminate the large stock of old and poor quality dwellings inherited from the industrial revolution. Flanders still holds a hard core of 200,000 substandard dwellings (nearly 10% of the housing stock). A large share of these dwellings are privately rented, which tends to accelerate the deterioration process, because, neither the landlords nor the tenants are inclined to renovate (Priemus, 1978).

These problems are a structural consequence of the Belgian/Flemish policy. They are aggravated by the effects of the post-Fordist restructuring of society. The second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 1995) has resulted in a considerable increase of households and housing needs. Structural unemployment and employment flexibility have decreased the opportunities for many households to access newly constructed owner occupied housing. The distance of suburbs from city centres and rising transportation costs have similar effects. As a result, private rental dwellings are increasingly sold and transferred to the owner-occupied sector, thus making the private rental market increasingly cramped (see absolute figures in Table 3). Since new developments do not compensate for the decrease of privately rented dwellings, the supply of affordable accommodation is shrinking. We will look at this later in this chapter.
Table 5. Number of dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants in selected EU countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VCB (2008)

The poor are also affected financially by the focus on home ownership in the Belgian/Flemish housing policy in that the policy carries perverse redistributive effects. Deleeck et al (1983) calculated years ago that middle and high income groups were the main financial beneficiaries of the housing subsidies schemes. Years later, Van Damme & Winters (2002) came to a similar conclusion. They stated: “It is striking that the fiscal profit decreases when the income decreases. The costs for the government of the fiscal benefits for higher income groups are much higher than the current housing investments targeted at the lower income groups”. De Decker (2000), using 1995 data, estimated that 40% of all housing related benefits went to the 20% of households with the highest earnings; only 10% went to the 20% of poorest households. The fiscal exemptions for households with a mortgage, which made up 80% of the governmental investments in housing at that time, are the main explanation for this distribution. More recently, Heylen & Haffner (2008) have reconfirmed that after the payment of housing subsidies, inequality increases. It is obvious that market-led homeownership is not a sustainable housing solution for poor and vulnerable households. The home ownership policies have brought about a shortage of good quality affordable dwellings and have absorbed huge amounts of money that could be used to support the poor directly, through social housing or rent allowances. In 1999, the total amount of money going into the Flemish housing system through tax allowances was €1.7 billion while the Flemish government only invested €0.3 billion Euro in housing (Doms et al, 2001). That same year approximately €190 million was spent on subsistence incomes in Flanders (authors’ calculation based on Vranken et al, 1999).

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7 For similar conclusions on Wallonia see Valenduc (2008).
8 The fiscal exemption regime has changed since 2005. The income and mortgage sensitive exemption (the higher income and/or mortgage, the higher the return) was replaced by a fixed deduction. Although the general effect of the reform is not yet known, the real benefit is still higher for high income groups because of the progressive tax rates.
9 The Flemish housing budget rose since then, but an overwhelming majority of this rise went and still goes into the renovation of the social housing stock. There are no indications that more poor people benefit from this budgetary effort.
Poverty and social housing: an inconvenient relationship

In the absence of any substantial rent allowance, the social rental sector is the only housing market segment in Flanders that is targeted, in principle, towards poor people. But, as we have seen, due to the policy focus on homeownership, the sector is too small to care for households who can't afford ownership and/or are not well served by the private rental market.

Nevertheless, social housing is the only sector that operates outside the market and therefore, its significance for the housing conditions of the poor is crucial. Due to its small size and the competition amongst households for the relatively good quality and low costs social housing units, the sector has traditionally addressed the needs of the upper working class and the lower middle class. However, the crisis of the 1970s and the subsequent quasi disappearance of these stable social groups, have initiated profound changes in the social housing sector.

A revival of social housing?

The effects of the crisis were all encompassing: the crisis of public finance was responsible for a sharp drop in the production of social housing units (Figure 1). The disappearance of stable employment for low and medium skilled manual workers, as a consequence of deindustrialisation and a growing flexibility, created a dualistic need for more social housing. Additionally, the informal sector grew and international migration flows increased.

The ban on new construction and the tendency for social tenants to stay in the sector, because of the housing quality and the low costs, resulted in a clear housing crisis in the 1980s (Notredame, 1994; De Decker, 2002), which was never officially recognised by the policy makers. Nevertheless, somewhat contrary to the international trend (Doherty et al, 2004), the Flemish government has increased its financial efforts to enlarge the social rental housing stock during the last 15 years. The relative recovery of the state in the 1990s and the fact that housing policy was devolved to the Regions, stimulated a housing policy revival. The first Flemish housing law was passed in 1997 and some of its features were implemented. Housing Ministers tried to increase the number of social rental dwellings by enlarging the available budget. And in 1998, the Flemish Parliament argued unanimously for the construction of an additional 40,000 social dwellings. As a consequence, the budgets have undeniably gone up (Figure 2) and the first government of the 21st century did what Flemish governments rarely did before – set a target: the construction of 15,000 new social rental dwellings during its period in office. However, after the turn of the millennium as production costs increased, the social housing budget has tended to stabilise.
Where are vulnerable people to live...

Figure 1: Social housing production in Flanders 1924-2004

Social Rental Housing Construction

Source: Flemish Housing Company

While there has been a revival of social housing in the past few years when compared with the preceding decade, when seen in historical perspective, the revival does not amount to much. Production levels since 1924 have always been as high as or higher than the last 15 years and indeed only in periods of severe crises – the 1930s, World War 2 and the 1980s – was housing production lower (Figure 1).

Figure 2: Changes in housing budgets, Flemish Government, 1993-2006, in 1,000€
In any case, the revival was dwarfed by needs. Based on the most recent findings and government-defined eligibility rules, Flanders needs approximately 180,000 extra social rental dwellings (Heylen et al, 2007). In the period 1997-2004, the number of social rental dwellings increased on average by 1,132 units each year\(^1\), meaning that closing the gap would take 160 years. The fact that the current Flemish government intends to set the goal at 45,000 new social rental dwellings by 2020 (a goal that subsequent governments can abandon), does not change the picture much.

Evidently, the priority for homeownership has created a huge shortage of social housing. Waiting lists are long (75,735 households in 2007, compared with 9,500 transactions). And of course, a large number of eligible households and persons do not apply. A survey among inner city dwellings of Ghent highlighted that 63% of the eligible households do not apply (Vandewiele et al, 2008). Waiting times are long too: the period between registration on the waiting list and being allocated a house increased from 637 days in 2003 and 689 in 2004, to 805 days in 2005.

**Dealing with a changing population**

The social tenants of today are not the stable upper working class and lower middle class households anymore. Elderly, low skilled people, single parents and people living on welfare benefits are over-represented in the social housing population. Only one out of three social tenants has an income from employment (Pannecoucke et al, 2001; Heylen et al, 2007). Today, as a consequence, the social rental sector reaches its ‘true’ target group more than ever. But this apparent success in housing the poor is not that evident, when looking at the processes behind this change and the reactions it provokes.

For a long time, being assigned a social dwelling was a step up on the housing ladder. Most of the ‘happy winners’ of social accommodation could leave the unregulated private rental sector with its high prices and bad quality dwellings for a modern and comfortable one, with reasonable rent and tenure security. But today as estates become older and in need of repair or refurbishment, social housing becomes less popular among its traditional customers. Moreover, the general increase in post-war prosperity and the development of social security has led, as we have seen, to a widespread homeownership among all social groups. As a consequence, the social housing population is changing. Although approximately two thirds of the households are below the income eligibility rules (theoretical target group) for social housing, the actual candidates are those who cannot afford home-

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\(^1\) This number is lower than the reported new construction figures. However, the yearly average also reflects the fact that a number of dwellings remain empty for a while before renovation and that current renovation of social housing estates usually entail a decrease in their number of dwellings.
ownership. People without choice on the housing market are increasingly combining housing needs with social and personal problems, related to post-Fordist working and living conditions.

This challenges the role of the social housing companies, who in the past stuck to housing management sensu stricto, i.e. management of the housing stock without care for the tenants. As a result of the devolution of housing policy to the Regions, the new conditions are exacerbated by stricter rules in housing allocation and stricter control of the social landlords. In trying to keep ‘business as usual’, social housing companies multiplied initiatives to limit the access of poor and potentially problematic households to their estates. Welfare workers and organisations working for the poor stress that despite the extra construction efforts, social rental housing does not help to alleviate hard core poverty (Vanhove, 2001). People experiencing multiple deprivation are not reached because social housing companies do not provide any welfare support and because they stick to the legal obligation to allocate on the basis of time on the waiting list. A striking consequence of all this is that homeless people have virtually no access to social housing (Lescrauwaet 2005).

Social mix as ‘deus ex machina’

The defensive attitude of the social housing companies is difficult to sustain and the awareness that social housing management is no longer limited to letting dwellings, is slowly penetrating the sector. Some social landlords started hiring welfare workers and a Flemish think tank has been established to address social problems on social housing estates. But since financial compensations for social support – the costs of which being at the expense of the tenants – is still lacking, these initiatives are making little headway. The main thrust of the sector is now favouring social mixing in order to preserve the financial and social liveability of the estates. They now want to attract higher income households and limit the access to social housing for households they explicitly categorised as ‘risk tenants’.

Since the 2006 revision of the 1997 Housing Law, there is now a broad consensus that social mixing is the solution to social housing problems. However, the term ‘social mixing’ is not defined. Some social landlords seek to attract households with a regular income from employment and ‘a normal household’ profile; others refer to ‘better tenants’ and families with children. But the very idea of social mixing implies the exclusion of very precise categories of households: people with (very) low and insecure income, single people, single mothers with children, foreigners

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77 Before the 1980s, social housing allocation was more than often a matter of political patronage, as most social housing companies emanated from the municipalities and their board members were appointed by the municipal council.
and the broader category of ‘maladjusted’ persons – people with prison records, households discharged from youth care and/or psychiatric institutions or substance users. (De Decker, 2005b; De Decker & Pannecoucke, 2002).

Behind the veil of a balanced population in the social housing estates, the government pursues two goals. The first is financial, since the increased influx of poor people has disturbed the financial stability of especially urban social housing companies. The idea that higher income households will yield higher rent incomes and ease the financial burden of the social landlords is becoming manifest. The second goal is increasing the social ‘liveability’ of the estates. ‘Better tenants’ are supposed to reduce social problems on the estates. ‘Better tenants’ should function as models for the others and take up estate leadership. The government even hopes to increase social inclusion for other households in this way and equates social mixing with creating equal opportunities for all.

Real policies behind imaginary mix

The set of measures introduced by the Flemish government to favour social mixing includes raising the income eligibility ceiling, enabling the local authorities to fix additional local allocation criteria and introducing the right to buy social dwellings. The effects of the first measure are evident. The increased involvement of local authorities in the allocation decisions dates back to the 1997 Housing Law, in which local authorities were able to take up a central role in Flemish housing policy. Since 1999, municipalities can set additional allocation criteria in consultation with the social housing companies operating in their territory. The motivation for this decision was the government’s desire that local authorities should have as much autonomy as possible in order to guarantee the liveability of the local social housing estates. The measure opens up the possibility for the municipality to give priority to local applicants. Such a criterion is justified by the idea that a local authority with common sense wouldn’t build social housing (through its local social housing company) just to see its local population waiting a long time before getting access to it. It is hard to tell what the consequences of the measure will be. But the choices made by local authorities are not neutral. The debate over the past 15 years which discussed the target groups of social housing made clear who the local communities wanted to include. The possibility to exclude social housing applicants from other municipalities is likely to be implemented by suburban and non-metropolitan municipalities to the detriment of poor households (and foreigners) from the large cities. Clearly, this change in the Flemish Housing Code paves the way for preference treatment on the one hand, and legal discrimination on the other hand.

12 A strong sign of this possibility is the fact that suburban and rural municipalities tend to redirect the asylum seekers allocated to their welfare centres by the federal state to the large cities.
The right to buy social dwellings was established in 2004 and implemented in 2006. A sitting social tenant can buy his/her dwelling if it is older than 15 years and if he or she has been living in it for at least five years. The law excludes the sale of apartments. The consequences of this partial commodification of social housing are easy to predict. The available stock of rental social housing will not increase as expected and may even decrease if the measure is very successful. In any case, one can expect that tenants accessing homeownership in this way will purchase their house only if they live in a good quality and well maintained estate. Thus, the measure will probably cause a marginalisation (residualisation) of the rest of the stock. This implies that through the combination of stock sales and the widening of the target group, access to social housing is getting even harder for poor households. Above that, because apartments are overwhelmingly located in the cities (Table 6), the measure contributes to the logic of keeping poverty outside the suburban and non-metropolitan municipalities.

Table 6. Percentage distribution of social rental dwelling in Antwer and Ghent, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>all</th>
<th>apartments</th>
<th>Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Antwerp</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities from the inner city</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First suburban ring</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second suburban ring</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan region</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Ghent</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First suburban ring</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second suburban ring</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan region</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: authors’ calculations based on the data of the umbrella organisation of the social housing companies and the Vandermotten et al (1985) urbanisation typology.

More recently, new legislation has included even more features that increases the difficulties faced by vulnerable people wanting to access social housing. The general tenor of the 2006 Housing Law explanatory memorandum appears to be repressive. In Parliament, the social tenants’ organisation VIVAS commented on the law as follows: “... In addition, this Decree breathe mistrust with regard to social tenants. Not all social tenants are potential troublemakers that need a repressive approach. It is only a small number that does not stick to rules and prescriptions”
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman (Parl. Stukken VI. Parl. 2005-06, nr 824/4 – authors’ translation). Mistrust is generated by the new possibilities to restrict access to social housing with new criteria, but also by the introduction of a seemingly endless list of new conditions, obligations and sanctions imposed on the tenants in the name of preserving the liveability of the estates.

Among these, the new housing law introduces two years probation contracts. In the words of the Minister, it is “a measure against people who keep on making trouble. After consultation, conversation and reminder, the housing companies get a chance to evict hopeless troublesome people. The goal is to avoid nuisance for other tenants; nuisance like making noise or dumping litter in the common spaces” (M. Keulen in Parl. St. VI. Parl. 2005-06, Nr 824/5: 5). Originally, it was the intention that the social landlords themselves would evaluate tenants, but a decision by the Constitutional Court destroyed that stipulation and ensured that any conflict between landlord and tenant would require the intervention of a judge. Although the introduction of a probationary tenancy can be a useful instrument, tenants who get notice during the probation period, as VIVAS states, end up in slum housing or homeless.

The most controversial element of the 2006 Housing Law is the obligation for tenants to learn Dutch. This stipulation suits the prevailing opinion that the liveability of social estates is at risk because of the increasing number of foreign households accessing social housing (see e.g. Cools, 2004). The justification of the measure is that,

“... [k]nowledge of Dutch will emancipate the tenant and will facilitate communication between the tenant and the landlord, and ameliorate security... It will stimulate and underpin participation of tenants. This will undeniably affect the liveability of an estate and the living together of the tenants. At the moment of application as well as at the moment of allocation, the tenant has to prove that he or she is willing to learn Dutch. On this basis, the applicant is expected to master the necessary communication skills from the beginning14", (Parl. St. VI. Parl. 2005-06, Stuk 824, Nr 1).

The ‘obligation to be willing to learn Dutch’ involves all new applicants and tenants and people still on the waiting list. A candidate can show his/her willingness by enrolling in a language course, which he or she is then expected to follow through. This will be taken into consideration at the moment of application. How precisely this will work is not yet clear. The Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, points to the consequences of this criterion (director De Witte in the

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13 This kind of reference deals with Parliamentary Documents.

14 In order to avoid the accusation of discrimination and racism (the legislation came under attack from the Council of Europe and the UN), even Flemish people have to prove they speak Dutch.
newspaper *De Standaard*, 6 December 2005), that the ‘equal chance’ of access to social rental dwellings is reduced for foreign people. The Centre is also afraid of ‘collateral damage’ on the private rental market:

“The centre is already confronted regularly with manifest cases of discrimination on the private rental market, where foreign people have difficulties in finding a suitable dwelling. The language requirement will have a reinforcing effect. How can the Flemish government explain that access to a social dwelling is burdened with a language criterion, while a private landlord is not bound to that and above all risks a condemnation for discrimination? In practice the language criterion will imply that a new group of tenants will not succeed in obtaining a suitable dwelling: golden times are coming up for slum landlords”.

What this will imply is not clear yet, but it is known that the most vulnerable people are not known for their ability to strongly enforce their rights. One can hardly say that the profound changes in the social housing sector are serving the housing needs of poor.

**Poverty and private renting: a difficult relationship**

*On the market*

For poor households, homeownership is not a realistic option and access to social rental housing is like winning a lottery. Vulnerable people are therefore confined to the private rental sector (see also Meert & Bourgeois, 2005a), where nearly all dimensions of housing rights are violated: affordability and housing quality are problematic and security of tenure is not guaranteed (De Decker, 2001). As long as the government stays aloof, these outcomes are basic characteristics of private renting since it is not a profitable activity to let reasonable quality dwellings if the clients are poor (Galbraith, 1992). This makes some authors plea for the abolition of the private rental sector (Hubeau et al, 1985). However, competition between accessible and valuable alternatives and the private rental sector could benefit tenants – at least in theory, because in practice the market hardly reaches reasonable equilibrium. But in Belgium, the low levels of new housing construction and the quantitative and social weaknesses of the social housing sector empower the private landlords. Moreover, the changes on the demand side since the crisis of Fordism have squeezed the local rental market. The upper tier of the market is affected by the fact that access to homeownership through construction is substituted by purchase of existing dwellings. As purchasers are also gradually becoming younger, the substitution process is speeded up and becomes increasingly manifest. Just as in the social housing sector, rental dwellings are transferred into
the owner-occupied sector (De Decker, 2005; De Maesschalck & Loopmans, 2002) and the lower quality and relatively expensive dwelling remain on the shrinking private rental market.

At the lower end, the rental market is pressured by a growing demand related to the second demographic transition and new immigration. A growing number of economically and socially vulnerable households, among which are single person and single parent households, have no other option than the private rental market. Even the worst and the most expensive dwellings get a tenant under such conditions. Meert and Bourgeois (2005) reported people living in caravans and shacks (either on recreational parks or solitary standing), in mobile homes and cars, in deplorable furnished rooms, in lodging-houses. They even found people renting mattresses.

These developments are reflected in rising average housing expenditures (the share of housing costs in the total household income) for tenants, from 21.8% in 1995 to 29.5% in 2005 (Pannecoucke et al, 2001; Heylen et al, 2007). In particular, private tenants pay an excessive share of their income on housing. In 2005, 39.2% of the private tenants paid more than 30% of their disposable income on housing, compared to 12.2% for social tenants and 17.1% of mortgaged owners; 17% of the private tenants paid more than 40%, compared to 5% of the social tenants and 6.3% of the mortgaged owners (Heylen et al, 2007). As a consequence nearly all private tenants have a lower purchasing power in real terms than 20 years ago (De Decker et al, 2008).

Increases in rent are no longer related to an improvement in dwelling quality, but almost exclusively reflect the pressures of the market. In the period 1976-1992, rent increases could at least partly be explained by increases in quality (Meulemans et al (1996), but not thereafter (Pannecoucke et al, 2003). Significantly, the lowest income groups, situated in the worst parts of the market, were confronted with the steepest rises in rental costs (Meulemans et al. 1996). Such pressures open the road for ‘slum landlordism’, for the renting of damp rooms and cellars. There is no systematic overview of the problem, but the written and visual media as well as the Flemish government’s housing inspections regularly report on harrowing housing conditions, especially where vulnerable people such as asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and others who have to live in difficult circumstances, are concerned.

There are two categories of rack-renters, according to the ‘Slum Up’ unit of the Antwerp police. The first and less ‘dangerous’ group consists of property speculators. These are private owners who, for instance, let one or two houses which they have inherited. The houses are often old and the owners have no intention of investing in renovation. Because these houses are in a part of Antwerp that has the potential of becoming attractive in the coming years, they are waiting for the value of their property to increase. In the meantime, they try to get as much rent money
as possible. The second group is smaller, but much more difficult to deal with. These are the professional rack-renters who let dozens of houses. This is usually done through different companies controlled by the same person. In Antwerp, five such cases were identified, each with more than one hundred houses.

Not surprisingly, discrimination is also a relatively frequent practice on an unregulated private rental market. Its consequence is an increasing pressure at the lower end of the market, resulting in even higher rent levels for housing of unacceptable quality. The Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism confirms the existence of discrimination and racism in this context (2003). The Centre’s register in the period 1993-2003, recorded that 60% of discrimination complaints concerned housing. Discrimination is not only based on ethnicity, but also on age, gender, socio-economic position and household structure (especially large families). Landlords tend to see unemployed, single persons, single parents and ethnic minorities as risky tenants because they threaten the ‘principles of renting’: stability, solvency, discretion and good neighbourliness (Pannecoucke et al, 2003; Rea, 2004).

A policy at the margins

The Belgian and Flemish governments have always believed in the capacity of the private rental market to optimise supply and demand, production and consumption of rental housing, and therefore refrained from intervening in a decisive way. As a matter of fact, rent control was introduced in the 1970s not to improve affordability of housing, but to slow down inflation and rent levels in new contracts remain unrestricted by law. Landlords and the tenants to-be agree on the rent without any governmental intervention. For the same reason, substantial rent allowances were never introduced, in sharp contrast with neighbouring counties (Pannecoucke et al, 2003; Winters & Marchal, 2004; De Decker et al, 2005); indeed, such an allowance would be senseless without a control over rent levels.

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15 Occasional research illustrates that this is no recent phenomenon. A 1982 survey in Ghent asked private landlords if they were willing to let to Turks, the largest immigrant population of the city. Hundred nineteen out of 156 interviewed landlords refused. Finally 18 landlords did let to a Turkish household, but the dwellings were hovels. Even the mediation of a tenants association that warrants rent payments and proper maintenance of the dwelling does not eliminate discrimination: on 233 demands in Ghent, 208 were refused by the landlords. And again, the rented dwellings were hovels (Kesteloot et al., 1997).

16 A limited rent allowance scheme exists under the form of a temporary subsidy to move from a substandard to a better dwelling. In Flanders 18,952 households were beneficiaries between 1996 and 2004, or on average 2,369 per year or 0.4% of the tenants. A new scheme introduced in 2007 will not substantially increase the number of beneficiaries.
Policies addressing the problems in the private rental market only operate at the margins. Among the few recent initiatives are efforts to improve tenure security and to facilitate housing access to homeless people. Recent laws have somewhat improved tenancy security, but for a substantial number of tenants, tenure security is a theoretical concept, since ease of access is accompanied by ease of exit. ‘Quickly in – quickly out’ applies to starter households, to people with flexible jobs and flexible relationships. For households who are too old or too poor to contemplate owner occupation, housing security is limited to 9 years and landlords have several means to cancel tenancy agreements before this term expires; indeed many agreements are short-term.

Policies helping people in the private rental market are restricted to a few tiny grant schemes. The Brussels Capital Region helps tenants to-be who cannot pay the rent deposit (equal to three months rent) with an interest-free loan. In 2005, the Federal government decided to extend a small equipment grant to homeless people. They can get a lump sum of about €820 to pay their installation costs.

**Grass roots reactions**

The difficulties vulnerable households experience on the private rental market are a structural problem in Belgium, inherited from past policies. Many present-day grassroots organisations reacting against dramatic housing conditions and discrimination were founded in the 1970s, in the wake of the economic crisis. The most important ones are tenant’s organisations (who basically limit their activity to legal advice) and social rental agencies (SRAs, who rent dwellings from private landlords to sublet them to a target group and guarantee rent payments -even in periods of vacancy- and the tenant’s maintenance duties) (see De Decker, 2001). In the early 1990s, both models were recognised by the Flemish government. They now operate within a legal framework and some of them receive staff and running costs subsidies and have the right to apply for renovation grants. There is a general agreement about the benefits of the SRA model and generally landlords are very satisfied (De Decker et al., 2009). However, their impact on the rental market remains insignificant and as a consequence their waiting lists are very long: at the end of 2004 the combined SRAs had 278 candidates per 100 dwellings, compared to 66 per 100 dwellings for social housing companies.

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17 According to the Flemish Tenants Association their share in the Flemish sub regions varies between 40 and 64% of the tenancy agreements (Vlaamse Huurdersbonden, 2005).

18 The loan is limited to 90% of the deposit. Strangely, persons lacking solvency are excluded from the scheme. At the federal level a proposition of law concerning the creation of a Rent Deposit Fund as been introduced. The tenant would repay a loan corresponding to 5 months rent according to a repayment scheme fitting his or her financial possibilities.
Conclusion

The long term obsession of the Belgian and Flemish governments with policies for stimulating home-ownership through self-construction does reflect the income progression of the middle-class and tends to imply that sooner or later all social groups, including the poor, will end up as homeowners. But such a view, which implies a blind faith in the capacity of market processes to achieve the best possible housing conditions for all, has perverse effects.

Because new housing construction depends on the economic achievements of the households and not on quantitative and/or qualitative shortages in regard to the housing needs, the speed of the filtering process triggered by new construction has never been able to replace the substandard housing stock and to offer decent and affordable housing conditions to all.

Additionally, the focus on ownership and reliance on the market has encouraged successive governments to neglect the development of an efficient social housing policy. The stock of social housing is small and has been poorly maintained. Today most investments are absorbed by maintenance and, despite the rhetoric, the so-called revival of social housing is dwarfed by the increasing number of poor households as a result of post-Fordist social transformations.

The financial health of the social housing companies is also jeopardised by the growing demand and the increasing financial and social difficulties of the new applicants. With the help of the Flemish government, social housing companies have reacted by advocating social mixing. Behind this discourse, which is embraced as the answer for poverty and social problems, techniques and strategies are being developed to ensure that the poor are excluded from social housing estates and driven towards the large cities. Consequently, poor households are de facto prisoners of the private rental sector, which is itself under pressure by increasing transfers of its dwellings into the owner-occupied sector. These pressures result in higher prices for lower quality.

The cumulative effects of these intertwined trends can only be addressed with a fundamental and powerful turn in the housing policies of both the Flemish and the Belgian governments, away from market processes towards deliberate redistributive measures. Without it, the future looks gloomy for a growing number of households in Flanders in terms of the size, quality and affordability of their homes.
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

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Urban Governance, Homelessness and Exclusion: Homelessness and Access to Space in Germany

Volker Busch-Geertsema¹,²

Introduction

A number of recent developments leading to restrictions and limitations of the ‘right to the city’ (Mitchell 2001, Lefebvre 1968) for socially marginalised groups and individuals in Germany are similar to developments elsewhere in Europe and show – at least in a superficial way – parallels to what has been described and analysed in the United States. However, while recognizing certain similarities, the different degrees of social and spatial exclusion between the USA and Germany should not be ignored and it should also be recognised that interpretations which might be valid for the United States do not necessarily apply to the trends observed in many European countries.

The number of shopping malls in Germany has increased from 65 in 1980 to 563 in 2007.³ Shopping malls grew especially rapidly in East Germany where a large number were built on the outskirt of the cities in the first years after German unification. While

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² An earlier version of this article was submitted as a thematic paper to the European Observatory on Homelessness, see also Doherty at al. 2008
³ The Institut für Gewerbezentrten provides updated information on the development of shopping malls in Germany on its homepage www.shoppingcenters.de. According to this information “Shopping Centers” have a minimum floor space of 8,000 square meters; in 2007, 360 of the 563 shopping malls had more than 15,000 square meters and where defined as “Regional Shopping Centers”. The number of these malls was expected to increase to 420 until the end of 2010 (see http://www.shoppingcenters.de/en/marktsituation/deutschland_2.html, download October 2008). According to the institute the development of Urban-Entertainment-Centres is still marginal in Germany and prospects are difficult to prognosticate.
this boom has come to an end in the East, from the late 1990s there has been a growth of new shopping malls in West German inner cities. In addition to the big shopping centres, about 500 arcades (Passagen) were counted in Germany in the year 2000 (Wehrheim 2006, p. 130), many of them have involved the conversion of former public spaces into private property. Both malls and arcades comprise semi-public spaces which are regulated in accordance with the rights of the proprietors and by private security services. It is easier to remove “undesirable” persons and people with “undesirable” behaviour from these semi-public spaces than when they where public. However, despite the increase of such semi-public spaces in recent years the total numbers are still much lower than in the United States or in the UK.

A special case is German railway stations in big cities which have been redeveloped into shopping areas in recent years. Germany might have had a leading role in this respect, the redevelopment of railway stations had important consequences for homeless people and we will come back to this example below.

Gated communities, defined as “residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatised” and as “security developments with designed perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents” (Blakely/Snyder 1977 : p. 2) have also emerged at a few places in Germany. According to Wehrheim (2006, p. 199), the greater influence of public urban planning in Germany – when compared with, for example, the USA – inhibits the rapid expansion of gated communities in Germany, although the balance between market and planning has also been changing in favour of the market in Germany.

Video surveillance of public spaces has gained much importance in Germany as in other EU countries, although the quantitative distribution of CCTV in Germany and especially of systems run by police forces is relatively low in comparison to the UK (Wehrheim, 2006, p. 90). However their number has been increasing rapidly in

4 Parallels can be seen regarding the redevelopment of railway stations in large cities of several European countries (for other examples see Tosi 2006 for Italy and Giannoni 2007 for Brussels South train station), but not in all: The dynamics of strategies to develop railway stations into new shopping areas might to some extent also depend on the role which this type of public transport plays in different European countries: in some of them busses are more important than trains for public transport. Furthermore Germany is one of the countries with rather large central railway stations even in large cities, while a more decentralised system of several railway stations may be found in a number of other EU countries.

5 For a case study on the use of CCTV in Berlin Shopping Malls see Helten/Fischer 2004. The authors argue that these video systems do not seem to be an efficient instrument of social control and exclusion. However they see the potential to realise more strategic objectives of CCTV also in Germany, but point to obstacles in form of „data protection concerns and the lack of political and economic support to go further“ (Helten/Fischer 2004: 343/344). The recent
recent years and one of the results of the public debate about attempted (but failed) bomb attacks on German trains in the summer of 2006 was the announcement by politicians and railway management of a massive expansion of video surveillance in railway stations and public places.

For some time the discourse on the “broken windows theory” and “zero-tolerance-strategies” gained high reputation in Germany, although criminality and the German prison population is still on a much lower level than in the USA. The prison population rate in USA is more than seven times higher (Walmsley, 2007) than that in Germany and attempts to criminalise begging and homelessness in Germany have not been developed to the extent that can be observed in the United States (see Tosi 2006 and 2007; Doherty et al 2008).

Private security services have increased a lot. However, it is difficult to get reliable figures. Wehrheim (2006: p.65) quotes the Federal Association of German Property Security Companies (Bundesverband deutscher Wach- und Sicherheitsunternehmen, BDWS), which reports an increase of the number of employees from 97,000 in 1992 to 145,000 in 2002. The number of companies which were members of the organisation rose from 1,290 to 3,000 in the same period. By 2008 the total number of affiliated organisations had increased to 3,500 with 177,000 staff (www.bdws.de). Even if it has to be taken in account that part of this development might be a statistical artefact caused by increased outsourcing, it remains a fact that commercial security forces are increasingly responsible for public and semi-public spheres like shopping malls, stations, pedestrian streets and public transport. They undermine the monopoly of police power and follow the rules of their contractors – private companies and proprietors of “public” spaces which are legally private. “Keeping away unwanted persons” from these spaces scores as high as “detention of possible offenders” among the services which are most asked for by customers of private security services (Beste 1998 quoted in Wehrheim 2006, p. 68). Wehrheim emphasises that measures against marginalised groups and against behaviour which is classified as “non-social” (such as begging, making music and ambulant trade) dominate among the responsibilities and duties of private security services.

events and discussions about increased threats by terrorism in Germany have helped to foster such support and have weakened the position of advocates for data protection.

6 Especially a cover story of Der Spiegel in summer 1997 (Title: “Clearing up like in New York”) gave much publicity to these ideas.

7 “Department store detectives, railway police, and factory security services have always existed. But the people who perform these functions used to be directly employed by the demanders of security and therefore appeared on the books as employees in commerce, transport, and industry. If they are today in the employ of service providers specialised in security their numbers increase in sectoral statistics. But the actual number of private security personnel need not have increased to the same extent.” (Siebel/Wehrheim 2003)
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

e.g. in the sector of public transport. A private service which was contracted by the *Berliner Verkehrsgesellschaft* (BVG) to police the Berlin’s public transport, promoted its services with a report on the enormous numbers of interventions against homeless persons (25,000 during the first nine months of the year 1992), 35,000 bans on travel for people caught consuming alcohol, and 46,000 removals from metro stations. During the same nine months period the security company had taken action 3,100 times against begging on the premises and in the trains of the transport company (Wehrheim 2006, p. 150).

Walter Siebel and Jan Wehrheim argue in a recent article (Siebel/Wehrheim 2003), that the “publicness” of urban spaces has changed and might be threatened to a certain extent by new surveillance systems in the city, but that so far it would be not appropriate to speak of a decline or a loss of public space.  

Obviously the instruments of surveillance and spatial exclusion are used to a different extent against different groups in different places. And often the extent and the way such instruments are used are also influenced by local conflicts and the balance of power at the local level. Many measures are not explicitly focussed on homeless people (but for example on drug users, members of youth gangs, punks and “dangerous” migrants). However the homeless – and especially the street homeless – are often among those who suffer under these measures.  

In the following we will focus on three cases which are especially relevant for homeless people and for each of these cases we will also report on examples of resistance which mitigate the extent of exclusion. First we will focus on the developments in the legal domain. A number of municipalities have introduced tougher local regulations against begging, consumption of alcohol and “anti-social behaviour” in inner city areas and are making increasingly use of area bans and the exclusion of individual persons from specific places or areas. But in several places resistance against restricting legal rights for staying in public spaces has been successful and it has been clearly stated that “loitering”, “silent” begging and the consumption of

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8 “Change, not decline” is one of the subtitles of this article. The authors also point to the fact that some types of public space have rather increased than declined: They mention the examples of derelict industrial sites and former military areas which have been – in a number of German regions – transformed into parks, residential neighbourhoods and office areas, some of them being used as industrial monuments owned by public organisations. They point to the function of new technologies like mobile phones and internet which have changed the boundaries between public and private spheres and provide new forms of “publicness”. They also emphasise that public space was never accessible by everyone who existed in the city. “It is always exclusive, as well. Throughout history, cities have differed in whom they choose to deny access to urban spaces, which spaces are off bounds and how access is denied. Today the homeless, drug addicts, and groups of foreign looking, male juveniles are effected. In the 19th century it were women and the industrial proletariat.” (Siebel/Wehrheim 2003)
alcohol outside of restaurants and commercial areas as such cannot be forbidden in public spaces (but is easier in privatised areas open to the public). Secondly, we will report about a local attempt to ban begging from inner city areas in Hamburg and the ongoing local fight for accepting begging as a part of urban life. Thirdly, we will report on the redevelopment of railway stations in large cities and about a campaign which was started by the national association of service providers for the homeless (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe) to prevent the Deutsche Bahn company from excluding poor people from the “new” stations.

Spatial exclusion in Germany: The legal domain

From 1871 right until 1974 the (West) German penal code (Strafgesetzbuch) contained a section (sect. 361) which made vagrancy, begging and resistance of “workshy” recipients of public benefits to work a criminal offence. Until 1969 this offence could be sanctioned with prison sentences or (under section 362) by institutionalisation in a work house for up to two years. Under the Nazi regime 1933 – 1945 more than a hundred thousand persons who were judged to be beggars, “work-shy” and “anti-social” were imprisoned and more than ten thousand of them were deported to concentration camps where many of them died (Ayaß, 1995 and 2004).

The legal basis for sentences against vagrancy continued to exist until 1974. Between 1969 and 1974 the possible sanctions were reduced to a fine of up to five hundred Deutsche Mark or imprisonment for up to six weeks. In West Germany the vagrancy legislation was abolished in 1974 while in East Germany “anti-social behaviour” could be sanctioned under section 249 of the penal code of the GDR until 1989.9

During the first years after coming into force in 1962, the National Act on Social Benefit (Bundessozialhilfegesetz) still contained a regulation (sect. 73) which allowed the internment of persons in institutions by force with the aim to “improve” their character. But in 1967 the Federal Institutional Court decided that it should not be the aim of the state to “improve” citizens, if they are neither a threat to the public nor to themselves and that this section of the National Act on Social Benefit had to be abolished.

If we nowadays speak about mechanisms of increased control it should not be forgotten that models and attempts of total control of the movements of poor unemployed itinerant men were seen as an important goal of providers of services for

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9 In GDR-legislation imprisonment up to two years was possible and in repeat cases even up to five years for “disturbance of public order and security by anti-social behaviour”. Resistance to regular work and prostitution were mentioned explicitly, but other ways of disturbing public order and security by an “anti social way of life” could also be penalised (Zeng 2000, p.38).
“wanderers”, “persons with an unsettled way of life” etc. for more than a hundred years. Until the 1970s there was a central register in Bielefeld-Bethel for controlling the stays of single homeless men in institutions for “persons with an unsettled way of life” all over Germany. Again and again, and until the late 1970s the attempt was made to control the movement and receipt of charitable goods by itinerant poor men with personal cards, which had to be stamped by local services.

It has been stated that the 1970s until the mid 1980s can be seen as the most liberal phase of treating street homeless people, drug addicts and persons with sub-cultural and deviant behaviour (Simon, 2001, p 44; Ronneberger, 2006). Until today a general ban on begging and consumption of alcohol in public spaces is not compatible with the German constitution and jurisdiction. However, from the mid 1980s onwards a number of cities have tried to introduce such general regulations. But when initiatives were questioned in court cases they were rescinded. For example, the higher administrative court of Baden-Württemberg reached a decision in 1998, that begging “at least in its quiet form of appearance” cannot be forbidden by local police by-laws, because it cannot be interpreted as a disturbance of public order and security (quoted in Wehrheim, 2006, p, 69 and in Simon 2001, p.49). Similarly, a case relating to a ‘punk’ in Ravensburg was subject to a decision by the same court that sitting down to drink alcohol cannot be banned generally by local by-laws. Similar decisions were taken by other courts such as the Higher Regional Court in Saarbrücken in 1997 and the Higher Administrative Court in Schleswig-Holstein in 1999 (see Hecker, 2002, p. 221, 223). In Schleswig-Holstein it was again a punk whose court case prompted the eradication of the “drinkers by-law” of the city of Elmshorn (see Nagel/Rieckmann 1999, p. 164). The basic argument of all these court decisions was that a general ban on begging and consumption of alcohol in public spaces is not compatible with the personal freedoms protected by section 2 of the German constitution. While it is possible to restrict this general personal freedom in specific cases, a general ban would be disproportionate and unreasonable. Begging and the consumption of alcohol as such do not qualify as abstract threats to public order and security.10 Hecker concludes for Germany that by this jurisdiction “the populist heated debate propagating New York as the model has found its clear limits in Germany because of the differences in constitutional state tradition and policy concepts for police and order” (Hecker, 2002, p. 221).

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10 Of course individual behaviour after consume of alcohol can lead to such a threat of public security or even to criminal acts, but in these individual cases the criminal law and other legal regulations provide a sufficient basis for police intervention. As in most other countries offences like coercion (sect. 240), robbery (sect. 249), insult (sect. 185) and theft (sect. 242) are punishable under the Federal Penal Code (Strafgesetzbuch).
However, by-laws and ordinances on public order are local affairs; a number of these which may be incompatible with the German constitution but have never been questioned by opponents. Furthermore the jurisdiction on such by-laws differs from regional state to regional state and at least in Bavaria an older court decision from 1982 favoured a general ban on the consumption of alcohol in specific city areas. This could be overturned by the Federal Constitutional Court could but it has never been tested (Hecker, 2002, p. 222). Furthermore, many cities have reacted to court decisions by retargeting their bans in local by-laws on “aggressive begging” and “excessive consumption of alcohol”, although the status of these acts remains unclear and they are legally questionable.

In a 2000 survey among 288 service providers for the homeless all over Germany, about three quarters of all respondents affirmed the existence of special local by-laws and ordinances for averting danger to public order. Most of these by-laws (more than 90 per cent) included regulations against social work client groups. 16 per cent of the respondents stated that every type of begging was forbidden in their city; almost 50 per cent affirmed a ban on “aggressive” begging and on sleeping rough in public spaces.

Another variant of spatial exclusion are ‘area bans’ (ad hoc “Platzverweis” or longer term “Aufenthaltsverbot”, bans against staying in a defined area for a defined time), which have been increasingly used by police forces since the 1990s in Germany, particularly focussing on open drug scenes and suspected drug dealers. Where the police laws of the regional states did not provide a legal basis for such interventions they have been amended accordingly. Nowadays almost all Länder-police laws allow such interventions of the police against people whose behaviour is defined as a potential threat to public security and in specific areas which are defined as “dangerous areas”. The police can “send off” people in such areas whom they suspect to be a “danger to public order and security”. “Platzverweise” can be for between one day to three months; “Aufenthaltsverbote” can last for one year or longer, without a court decision. Especially in the case of drugs courts have refused several times to condemn such displacements and area bans as violations of the constitutional right of free movement (Hecker 2002, p. 223 ff.). Persons who are banned from specific areas and are discovered there by the police can be fined or jailed in order to enforce the area ban. Again, the homeless are not the group most affected by these measures (suspected drug dealers and drug addicts are the main target group, “junkie-jogging” has become a commonly used term for police actions which aim at dispersing established drug scenes), but homeless people can sometimes be caught up in them.
A specific form of ad hoc spatial exclusion is a police action called “Verbringungsgewahrsam”. Suspects are deported by the police from a public or semi-public space to the outskirts of the city and released there. In some extreme cases those police practices led to people freezing to death, as in Stralsund in winter 2003 (Wehrheim 2006, p. 59; taz 2003). Von Mahs (2005, p. 945) reports on this practice in Berlin in the late 1990s. Five of the 28 single homeless people he interviewed there had experienced deportations:

They were temporarily arrested in public spaces by the police for violating public order and safety ordinances and were consequently deported and released in remote areas outside the city limits. Such deportations were a common practice by the police in post-unification Berlin and were justified as a measure to avoid a formal arrest with all its damaging consequences (Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin 1996; Eick 1998).

Yet such deportations, in contrast to police directives, were performed at night, in the winter, and over one mile away from an entry point to Berlin’s public transportation system. Furthermore, four of the people were intoxicated, which caused one to almost freeze to death after he had been unable to find a warm place when police released him in a forest outside Berlin during the winter of 1995. All of this demonstrates the harshness of security measures that actually endangers homeless people’s lives. However, some short interviews with experts on homelessness in Berlin by the author of this chapter allow for the assumption that at least in Berlin these practices were discontinued after public debates or that they are applied nowadays – if at all – on very rare occasions.

Summing up, we can state that there has been a general trend since the late 1980s to restrict begging and sleeping rough and to ban the consumption of alcohol in public space outside of restaurants and commercial areas. The resistance of poor individuals who were targets of police interventions and went to court against it has helped to make clear that a number of by-laws are not compatible with the German constitution and that only particular individual behaviour which constricts the rights of others can be prohibited. Nevertheless police intervention to remove “undesirable” individuals or groups from specific areas without having to prove the violation of laws has increased in recent years. Homeless people are not the main target group but they – especially those who live and sleep on the street – have to suffer under such measures as well. In privatised space open to the public, like shopping malls or arcades and nowadays also in railway stations (see below) it is much easier to restrict access for individuals which are unwanted by the proprietors.

Some authors have argued that the resistance of persons who were victims of increased attempts of control and exclusion and challenged this in court were successful in clarifying the (legal) limits for excluding “unwanted” groups from
specific areas than was the somewhat paternalistic intervention of social workers seeking to find compromises on the local level (Nagel/Rieckmann, 1999; Simon, 2005). Probably both have been important in strengthening, on the one hand, the limits against unlawful restrictions of access to public space and against certain behaviour which is not more than a tolerable nuisance and, on the other hand, to find sometimes local compromises to facilitate “peaceful coexistence”. The first can be done by empowering the people concerned to actively resist, but there is also a need for public campaigns to raise awareness of increased exclusion of homeless and poor people from public spaces. Examples in Germany are campaigns of the national alliance of services for the homeless, BAG W, and interventions by local NGOs such as in Hamburg against attempts to introduce a ban on begging (see below). On the other side there are also good examples of successful local compromises in order to reduce an escalating local conflict about the gathering of certain groups in certain places e.g. by providing acceptable alternatives with additional infrastructure.

The national coalition of service providers for the homeless (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe, BAG W) has organised a series of national campaigns against the exclusion of poor people from public spaces. In particular the “Night of the Homeless” (1993) and the campaign “The City belongs to All” (1998) emphasised the right of poor and homeless people to use public spaces and the resistance against measures to remove them by new regulations, privatisation and increased intervention by police and private security services.

Legal experts emphasise that public resistance against spatial exclusion and debates on the local and national level with decision makers (for example in local authorities, public transport, commerce and investment) are equally important as individual legal fights against excessive regulations and interventions (Hecker, 2002, p.229).

Attempts to forbid begging in Hamburg City and local resistance

In Hamburg, with 1.7 million inhabitants the second largest city of Germany, begging has constantly been a topic of public discussion. In 1996 the regional minister of the interior (Hamburg is a city-state), Hartmut Wrocklage (a social democrat) had asked in an internal paper for “measures against the inhospitality of the city”, and mentioned begging as a particular problem. After critical public reactions a revised version of the paper, still calling for measures against beggars and street homeless people was presented by Wrocklage and the mayor of Hamburg at that time, Henning Voscherau. But the revised paper was still criti-
cised heavily by the church, welfare services and initiatives and attempts to forbid
begging were withdrawn. In a 1997 survey among the population of Hamburg, 80
per cent stated that they did not feel disturbed by begging. The organization of
so called “Beggar’s Marches” (e.g. the November 2005 “IV. Beggar’s March” – taz
hamburg, 14.11.2005) became a new tradition for demonstrations against poverty
and social exclusion in Hamburg.

In December 2005 a new initiative was taken by the chamber of commerce in
Hamburg to introduce a ban on begging in specific inner city areas. The chamber
called for a time limited “pilot project” to forbid begging in the period between 1
March and 1 October 2006, a period which included the weeks of the World Football
Championship. The new minister of the interior, Udo Nagel, backed this proposal
and argued (in an article in Hamburger Abendblatt, 30th December 2005) that many
citizens felt the main nuisance was from “organised” begging by handicapped
migrants from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria), but that a ban had to deal with both the
foreign and the local beggars.

But again there was widespread resistance against a ban on begging in the city of
Hamburg: The street paper “Hinzt&Kunzt” wrote an open letter to Hamburg’s
Mayor Ole von Beust (Christian Democrats) and reminded him of the traditional
opposition of Hamburg’s citizens against excluding homeless and poor people from
the city. The authors stressed that for some people begging is the only legal way
to “earn” some money and that even street paper selling wouldn’t provide an
alternative for every beggar. They also expressed their fears that a ban on begging
would soon be extended from some inner city streets to larger areas and from
beggers to other groups like the homeless in general and other poor people. In a
campaign, organized by the street paper, a number of prominent citizens showed
the “red card” against a ban on begging. The president of Diakonisches Werk
Hamburg, the largest service provider for the homeless, argued for fighting against
poverty instead of fighting against the poor and emphasised that a ban on begging

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11 Special thanks to Stephan Nagel, homelessness officer at Diakonisches Werk Hamburg, for
providing me with a huge bulk of information about on recent debates and local publications
about banning beggars from the city of Hamburg and the resistance against these attempts.
Meanwhile Nagel has also published an article in English on these events, see Nagel 2007.

12 It should be noted at this point that – contrary to the UK (see Fitzpatrick/Kennedy 2000 and 2001
and Kennedy/Fitzpatrick 2001) – there is very little research on the phenomenon of begging in
Germany and neither on the particularly interesting relationship between street paper selling and
begging. In a survey among almost 1,300 rough sleepers in Hamburg in 2002, 8.1 per cent of
respondents stated that begging was their most important source of income. Further 9.9 per
cent stated to have no income at all (Schaak 2002, p. 45). It is clear that a part of people begging
is not homeless, but there is no reliable information about the size of this part and whether results
from the UK that the majority of beggars are homeless (see Fitzpatrick 2006) can be confirmed
for Germany.
in some inner city areas would only remove poor people to other parts of the city. She also reminded politicians that the legal basis for a ban on begging was more than questionable and that Hamburg praises its citizens for being open, tolerant and respectful towards others.

An opinion poll on behalf of the newspaper Hamburger Abendblatt (published 7 January 2006) showed that from 721 Hamburg citizens 40 per cent were in favour and 49 per cent against a ban on begging. A little later, another representative opinion poll, carried through on behalf of the national journal Der Stern by the research institute FORSA showed that two thirds (63 per cent) of 1,003 people interviewed all over Germany were against a ban on begging in inner city areas, while 32 per cent voted in favour of it (Stern, 3/2006).

In February 2006 Social Democrats and members of the green-alternative list (GAL) as well as Christian Democrats made clear that there was no parliamentary majority for a general ban on begging in the inner city of Hamburg. The regional Minister of Justice pointed out that there would not be a sufficient legal base for such a general ban. However, in the following months the authorities intervened against a group of twelve Bulgarian handicapped beggars with tourist visas who were accused of “organised and commercial begging” (obstructing the right of way) and who were given an area ban for central Hamburg. According to press reports some of them re-appeared in another area of Hamburg (Hamburg Altona) in May 2006. Local Bishops and other prominent people criticised these measures as arbitrary and embarrassing; others favoured them as fight against exploitation of handicapped poor people. The local debate showed that public opinion was much easier to mobilise against “foreign” beggars (versus “local” beggars, who can count on greater sympathy and compassion) and “the action against ‘alien’, ‘foreign’ beggars elicited only minor political resistance in Hamburg” (Nagel 2007: p. 12).

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13 Five percent stated that they didn’t know or didn’t want to vote and six per cent were indifferent.
14 Note that the percentages between different opinion polls on begging have quite different results, which might at least partly be a result of what is currently discussed at different places (in Hamburg there was a local debate on a concrete proposal and ongoing discussions about “foreign” beggars in the city, while in other places of Germany begging was not as present as a topic of public debate) and what is the exact question to be answered by respondents.
15 It should be noted that Hamburg has a large number of shopping centres which are policed by private security services and that attempts in other areas of Hamburg, e.g. near Hamburg’s railway station to remove established drug scenes with a combination of measures (including massive police intervention and the emission of classical music) have been more “successful” in the sense of their initiators. The focus on migrants being the main target of recent initiatives to tighten control of urban space and take action against begging is also emphasised by Tosi (2006 and 2007). He also points to the revival of the traditional distinction of deserving and undeserving poor, which can be found here.
Privatisation of public space: The case of Deutsche Bahn and the German Railway stations

Apart from some regional railway companies, the Deutsche Bahn Holding, the national German railway company has an almost monopolistic position in Germany. It is a private holding which in 1994 took over the business of Deutsche Bundesbahn (the former West German state railway) and of Deutsche Reichsbahn (the former GDR state railway). At the date of writing this chapter, the holding is still 100 per cent owned by the state, but it is planned to go public and deal shares at the stock exchange.

Part of the modernisation process and of the plans to make the railway company into a more profitable business has been the redevelopment of railway stations, especially by converting the larger ones into big shopping centres. Revenue from renting shopping areas should thereby be increased and the general image of the Deutsche Bahn and its stations should be improved.

In the late 1990s it was planned to convert about half of the more than 6,000 existing railway stations into modern centres for shopping and service by investing about 15 Billion Euro (Wehrheim 2006, p. 143). Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover, Mannheim, Leipzig and the new main station in Berlin are only a few examples where this strategy was realised. Shopping areas in the new railway stations are particularly attractive for business because their opening hours are exempt from usual restrictions in Germany and of course because of the location which ensures that large numbers of potential clients pass by. The new main railway station of Berlin, opened in 2006 provides 15,000 square meters space for 80 shops, open 7 days a week until 22.00 or later; Leipzig main station even provides 30,000 square meters for 140 shops, including food shops and restaurants (information from internet site of Deutsche Bahn: www.hbf-berlin.de and www.bahnhof.de).

The “3-S-program” is the fundamental strategy of Deutsche Bahn to improve the image of the stations. 3 S means “Service, Sicherheit und Sauberkeit” (service, security and cleanliness). Universal house rules for every railway station forbid – among many other things – “begging and nuisance of other persons”, “excessive consumption of alcohol”, “sitting and lying on the floor, on stairs and entrance areas”, and “searching garbage bins”. In earlier versions “loitering” was explicitly forbidden, but the wording was changed. In 54 so called “3-S-centres”, 27 of which are equipped with modern video- and communication-equipment, the new standards are controlled. According to recent press information of Deutsche Bahn, the number of people working in security services at the railway stations was to be
increased from 2,200 to 3,000 persons (Der Tagesspiegel, 22.8.2006). In addition about 5,000 members of the national police guard (former Bundesgrenzschutz) are present in German railway stations.

Homeless and poor people, who have traditionally been present in high numbers in and around German railway stations as in many other countries, are not welcome under the new strategy and it has been several times clearly expressed by the Bahn-management that the removal of the homeless and of drug addicts from the station was an explicit target. In 2001 the railway chief, Hartmut Mehdorn, stated in an interview that “railway stations are not the right place for homeless people” and called the Travellers’ Aid Centres (Bahnhofsmision) to stop handing out warm meals to homeless people.16

If it rains and the Bahnhofsmision provides soup, no homeless person is prepared to go out into the rain. They sit down at the entrance and ask for some change. Our clients don’t like that. Homeless people are not malicious people, but they don’t fit into the railway station (Bild am Sonntag, 14.10.01, translation by the author).

In 2002 BAG W started a campaign in 100 cities against the exclusion of homeless people from railway stations using the advertising slogan of the railway company “The station discovery” and adding “who does not consume gets thrown out”. When they wanted to rent advertising spaces in the railway stations for putting up the posters of the campaign, the reaction of Die Bahn was another example of the consequences of the privatisation. The Bahn management prohibited that such posters would be shown on railway premises and on premises near the stations which are property of the railway company. After the success of a first court case

16 The Travellers’ Aid Centres which are run jointly by the welfare agencies of both large churches in Germany (Diakonie and Caritas) have a long tradition. The first “railway mission” was opened in Berlin in 1894 and about 100 centres are working at stations. Most of the staff are volunteers and one of their main duties are to look after travellers who need help, in particular disabled people and children. But they are also a traditional source for advice and material support for poor and homeless people. Warm food was only provided in a few of the 100 centres, but others provide something cold to eat as well. Deutsche Bahn used to provide rooms to the Bahnhofsmission free of charge. While Diakonisches Werk rejected the plans of Deutsche Bahn to ban homeless people from railway centres (see EKD 2001), the Travellers’ Aid Centres also praised the good cooperation and were willing to compromise. Meanwhile a number of them have stopped to provide warm meals. It is also interesting that the Federal Ministry of Transport had refused to comment on the statements by Hartmut Mehdorn, stating that these affairs are sole responsibility of the Deutsche Bahn AG, despite the fact that the company is still owned to 100 per cent by the German state.
against this ban\textsuperscript{17} BAG W had to withdraw an appeal because it was unlikely to succeed and would have been expensive.

It is clear that the privatisation of the railway company made it much easier for the management to exclude homeless and poor people from its premises. However the addition of shopping centre to railway stations has also underlined their public character and the fact that they are not only used by travellers.\textsuperscript{18} Exclusion of individuals is only possible if they violate the house rules, although these are stricter than they would have been if stations had fully retained the status of public places.

The main shift in the orientation of the Bahn-management has been from citizens to business clients and a shift away from acknowledging the traditional social functions of railway stations for certain groups of the society (Hecker, 2006). However, the debate on railway stations as public places which are not comparable and should not aim at competing with airports is still on-going.

\textbf{Conclusion}

While some authors emphasise the parallels between USA and European countries in regard to the restrictions of access to public space, the introduction of new technologies of surveillance and control, and a trend towards criminalisation of poverty, there is sufficient evidence that important differences have to be taken into consideration (see also Doherty et al. 2008).

While the discourse on “zero tolerance” and the debate on introducing tough measures against “small offences” has swept from the US to Europe and might be one of the reasons why the timing of important changes in public debates on control of public space is rather similar in most European countries (the mid 1990s) it is also the case that after a short and heated boom the influence of this debate on practical measures was not as radical as it might have appeared. For examples see the failure of testing the zero tolerance approach in Finland (Korhonen 2006), the short period of increased incarceration of beggars in Ireland (O’Sullivan 2006) and the limits set by court decisions in Germany against the criminalisation of begging and drinking alcohol in public spaces.

\textsuperscript{17} Arguing with the constitutional freedom of expression and the character of railway stations as public places.

\textsuperscript{18} This point was also made by Müller/Boos 2004 (p. 165) in their article on CCTV in Zurich main railway station. The unwritten ‘house rule’ stating that visitors of the station have to own a valid train ticket is too restrictive if part of the station has been converted into a shopping centre.
However, a general tendency towards increased exclusion of homeless and poor people from inner-city areas and from spaces which have been converted from public to “semi-public” by privatisation exists in Germany as elsewhere in Europe. The use of specially designed urban furniture (like individual seats instead of benches, or benches on which you cannot lie down) and architecture which aims at keeping “undesirable” people away from public and semi-public spaces (see examples for Sweden in Sahlin 2006) was not a focus of this chapter, but it is also wide spread in places like railway and underground stations.

The question why the demands for control of public space and exclusionary practices have increased especially in the 1990s in several European countries is difficult to answer. Economic processes of increased privatisation of formerly public tasks and spaces might be one element of the explanation. The technological progress (better cameras and more efficient technologies for CCTV for example) might be another. “Projection of fear” and a general feeling of increased insecurity for a majority of the population – relatively independent of whether such fear is based on real dangers – might be the most powerful explanation. Siebel and Wehrheim (2003) list a whole bundle of very different causes which lead to such fear and to the wide spread prioritisation of “quiet and order” in the city among the vast majority of the population. The demographic change (increase of older people, who generally tend to feel unsafe), increased migration and the increased visibility of “strangers”, changes in the labour market and the erosion of the welfare state (and the redefinition of fear of downward mobility as fear of crime), dirt and vandalism, privatisation of the media (and accumulation of spectacular and dramatic reports on crime), the commodification of security (and a flourishing market of security industry based on fears), urban development processes which increase spatial separation of functions and social groups, but also the erosion of traditional milieus and the pluralisation of life styles- all these factors together (and some more) nourish an excessive demand for security and a tendency to further erosion of the public-ness of urban spaces.

The homeless are not the main target group of most exclusionary strategies but they – and especially those living rough – often are among the victims. Local, regional and national resistance against strategies to exclude poor and homeless people from public and semi-public spaces can have a considerable impact on the extent and “success” of such strategies and at least set certain limits.
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The Impact of Legislative Change for Young Homeless People: Comparing Scotland and England

Introduction

This essay presents empirical findings from research on the impact of legislative change on young people (aged 16-24 years) who experience homelessness in the UK. The post-1997 period of New Labour governments in the UK has seen a major review of homelessness, with important changes to the legislative framework which have been broadly welcomed across the housing policy and practice community. The legislative framework in Scotland is somewhat more robust than that of England, but the general thrust of policy in both countries has been the move towards a more strategic, preventative approach to homelessness, rather than a reliance on crisis intervention. While acknowledging the constructive improvements in the legislative framework, however, it has also been apparent that the effectiveness of policy change will depend very much on local statutory agencies, and their partners, for implementation.

Although it has not been possible to incorporate a full literature review in this paper, research since the early 1990s (e.g. Anderson and Tulloch, 2000) has consistently shown that young people are overrepresented among homeless households and that there are distinct risks and pathways associated with youth homelessness. Recent legislative change has the potential to improve the housing and support outcomes for many vulnerable young people who face homelessness and seek assistance from their local housing authority. It is therefore both timely and appropriate to examine the impact of legislative change on young people. Given the

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differences in the detail of the legislative framework between Scotland and England, a study which covers both jurisdictions also has the potential to contribute to our improved understanding of the impact of policy change on practice.

Since the introduction of homelessness legislation in the UK in 1977, the level of assistance provided by statutory authorities has been highly dependent on whether homeless households are considered to be ‘in priority need’ as defined in the legislation. Through the 1980s and 1990s, both researchers and campaign organisations have argued that greater priority should be given to young people on account of their particular vulnerability to homelessness and the potential long term damage of the experience and their limited resources to house themselves independently of the state. This paper focuses on the issue of changes to the legal categories of priority need in relation to young homeless people.

**Legislative change**

The core legislation cited below is supported by more detailed codes of guidance on homelessness practice (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2002; Scottish Executive, 2005). The focus for the research is on the areas of homelessness legislation where change has been introduced, rather than on the entirety of the legislative framework. A key area of change was with respect to the assessment of priority need for young people aged 16-24 years and the consideration of vulnerability leading to the award of priority need status.

**Housing (Scotland) Act 2001**

Under this Act local authorities retained their longstanding duty to secure permanent housing for those accepted as homeless and in priority need. This act extended the duties of local housing authorities to the provision of temporary accommodation for non-priority need households. The Act also introduced a duty to assess homelessness and publish a local homelessness strategy.

**Homelessness Act 2002 (England and Wales)**

The relevant provisions contained in this act were:

- A new duty on housing authorities to undertake a homelessness review and produce a homelessness strategy
- A duty to provide advice and assistance for those for whom there was no duty to secure housing
A change in the existing duty to provide housing for those homeless and in priority need for two years, to an indefinite duty until the homelessness duty is discharged

A power to secure accommodation for non-priority applicants

A duty of co-operation between housing and social services in dealing with homelessness

The introduction of new categories of priority need:
- Young people aged 16 and 17 years
- Young people aged 18-20 years, with a care background
- Other vulnerable care leavers, aged up to 24
- Vulnerable as a result of having been in the armed forces
- Vulnerable as a result of having been in prison
- Vulnerable due to fleeing violence

The Priority Need Order came into force on 31 July 2002, with the Act fully in force from September 2002.

**The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003**

This legislation also introduced new priority need groups, but with the long term provision that priority need be phased out by 2012, by which time the duty would be to house all homeless households. The priority need categories as amended by this Act were:

- Chronic ill health, abortion, miscarriage
- Vulnerable due to discharge from hospital, prison, or armed forces
- Aged 16 or 17 years
- Aged 18-20 years and at risk of sexual/financial exploitation, misuse of alcohol or drugs, or formerly looked after by the local authority when left school
- Risk of or actual violence or harassment due to religion, sexual orientation, race, colour, ethnicity, national origins
- Risk of domestic abuse.
The 2003 Act also allowed for the local connection provisions to be suspended for all applicants, and for the modification of the intentionally homeless provisions by changing the duty to investigate to a power, and introducing a requirement to provide temporary accommodation and appropriate support to address reasons for intentional homelessness.

Research aims and method

The overall aim of the study was to assess the impact of recent legislative change on the ability of young people to access homelessness and support services.

In order to try to gauge overall response to legislative change, a survey of local housing authorities in England and Scotland was undertaken using an email questionnaire sent to homelessness strategy officers. As a precaution against a low response rate, the survey was sent to all local authorities, rather than to a sample. Of the 256 English local housing authorities, 175 entered the survey and completed some of the questionnaire, indicating a response rate of 49%. In presenting the findings of the questionnaire survey, the number of respondents (N) for each question is shown on all tables. Some survey questions, where the response was too low to be valid, have been excluded from the analysis. The Scottish questionnaire achieved a higher response rate of 73% (24 out of 33 authorities), but response rates for individual questions are still reported in tables.

Qualitative fieldwork was conducted in three case study local authorities: a London Borough, a Midlands City and a Scottish City. Case studies were selected as areas with a high level of homelessness, and being large enough to ensure that the proposed fieldwork would be feasible. The selection was not based on any prior assessment of practice or performance. The case study data is illustrative (rather than representative) of issues with respect to implementation.

Within each case study local authority, researchers held a series of small group discussions with young people who were, or had recently been, homeless. Most were in temporary or medium term supported accommodation at the time of the discussions, although some currently roofless people took part in discussions held in a day centre. A number of recently homeless participants in the Scottish City were in their own tenancies. Groups included young men and women aged 16-24 years and from a range of ethnic backgrounds. In all, 99 young people took part in 17 discussion groups.
The researchers also held group or individual discussions with staff in the three case study areas, including local authority homelessness and social work staff, as well as workers from other service providers such as housing associations, supported accommodation projects, day centres and advice agencies.

Young people’s experiences

Most young participants were in some form of temporary accommodation although a small number remained roofless at the time of the study.

Young participants exhibited a lack of knowledge about what agency they should initially approach when facing homelessness. The length of time spent waiting in local authority homelessness services was a factor raised in London and Scotland. Young people found the experience of ‘presenting’ as homeless confusing and intimidating – notably in terms of requirements to produce written information and evidence. For example, young people who had left a parental home due to irreconcilable breakdowns were asked to provide proof that required them to return to that parental home.

In both English case studies, young people reported that they had been turned away from local housing authorities due to not qualifying as having priority need. This lack of awarding priority was a major issue for homeless young people in the English case study areas. In the London Borough case study, a high proportion of young participants (most of whom had been deemed not in priority need by the local authority at some stage) reported a very negative view of the local authority homelessness service as merely offering them a list of possible non-statutory agencies to contact by telephone.

Although Scottish young people were aware of priority status as an issue, it was not seen as a barrier to them receiving assistance, to the same extent as in England. The differences in perception and experience between the Scottish and English case study areas reflect the subtle differences in the new legislative frameworks. Young homeless people in the English examples were much more conscious of the link between receiving priority need status and access to temporary accommodation.

I went to the council, but basically if you’ve not got any health issues and not pregnant you can’t really have a need, you’re not priority.
(London Borough, female 18 years old, recently homeless, has slept rough)

I thought social services would help, because I wasn’t 16 they couldn’t help me. Then I went to the council, because you’re over 16 you’re not counted as priority.
(Midlands city, female 18, hostel dweller, experience of sleeping rough, domestic violence and racial harassment)
A very high proportion of participants had been considered to be not in priority need on making homelessness applications and considered their experience of making an application to have been almost wholly negative. Outcomes remained highly dependent on whether or not a young person had their presentation recognised as an application, and the judgement made by homelessness staff as to whether they were considered to be in priority need.

Nearly all young homeless participants lacked working knowledge of the homelessness legislation, regardless of their routes into temporary accommodation or long term housing. Pregnancy was most frequently mentioned as a route into housing, with two participants reporting that they themselves had been housed due to pregnancy. Being a ‘drug addict’ was the next most significant response, followed by mental and physical health problems.

_They have a priority system and if you don’t fit in to a certain category i.e. mentally ill or have a drug problem. If you don’t have a drug problem or a mental illness then basically you don’t have a chance._

*(Midlands city, male 18-21 years old, homeless within last 3 months, experience of care system, sleeping rough and imprisonment)*

Overall, there was a strong sense of unfairness in terms of who was and wasn’t given priority for housing, and that the statutory homelessness service should help all young people.

Many participants commented on having no knowledge of housing and homelessness before leaving school.

_At school you get sexual health education, and you already know that. They don’t tell you about homelessness. A lot of my friends got pregnant just so they could have a place to stay. I’m not going to get a house like that. Some people just actually do that so they can get a house and they end up with two or three kids and they can’t live a life_

*(London borough, female 18 years old, first homeless within the last three months, experience of domestic violence and racial harassment)*

Young homeless people were generally positive about the quality of temporary accommodation, although some had bad experiences in terms of problems with other residents (e.g. relating to drugs, bullying or violence). Most accepted a likely stay in temporary accommodation of between six months to a year, prior to accessing permanent housing. Most young people had access to support and life skills training designed to aid their successful transition to long term accommodation. The importance of acquiring such skills was widely recognised and the help provided in doing so was generally praised by the young participants.
Although many young people interviewed thought that they had the skills necessary to cope with independent living, others recognised that they may need further support and stated their preference would be a flat with support or some form of floating support. In other cases a level of resentment against living in an environment where the young people had to justify their independence was evident.

*He was saying that I had to prove to him that I could live independently. I had to prove to him that I’m independent after living homeless for a year. I said to him, can you, can you prove that you can live on the street for a year? If you can live as homeless for a year, go ahead.*

(London borough, male 20 years old, first homeless when 18, experience of sleeping rough and racial harassment)

With regard to long term housing, a very high proportion of participants expressed a strong preference for a local authority tenancy. Young people were aware of housing associations/RSLs but in England these were perceived as being significantly more expensive than council tenancies. When asked about the privately rented sector as an option, most participants discounted this on grounds of cost, quality, and long term security.

### The perspective of local housing authorities

This section reports on local authority responses to legislative change, with a particular focus on the assessment process and decision making on priority need and vulnerability. Analysis draws on the national email survey and the interviews and discussions with staff in the three local case study areas.

A key aspect of the research was to assess the impact of the changes to the categories for potential vulnerability of young people aged 16-24 years, and hence increased potential for their being accepted as in priority need for rehousing. In the email survey, local authorities were asked to assess the proportion of young people assessed as being in priority need for a variety of reasons – before and after legislative change. It should be noted that the only new mandatory category of priority need is the age range 16-17 years. The other changes introduced still allow a degree of judgement as to vulnerability due to, for example, having been in care or having been in prison. Only if the authority decides the young person is vulnerable because of these circumstances will priority need be awarded.

### Young people aged 16-17 years

Table 1 shows the clear impact of legislative change where an additional duty is placed on local authorities to recognise all young people aged 16-17 years as being in priority need. The proportion of local authorities accepting most/all 16-17 year
olds as priority need increased from 32% to 70% after implementation of the new legislation. While this is a positive change, the post-2002 proportion should ideally be reported as 100%.

| Table 1 English local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Age 16-17 years |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 16-17 year olds: Local authority usual practice | Very few accepted | Significant minority accepted | Slight Majority Accepted | Most/all accepted | N |
| Before Homelessness Act 2002 | 47% | 11% | 10% | 32% | 81 |
| After Homelessness Act 2002 | 1% | 13% | 16% | 70% | 79 |

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

The pattern in Scotland (Table 2) was much more robust with all respondents saying they would award priority to 16 and 17 year olds both before and after legislative change in line with both the Scottish code of guidance prior to the 2003 Act and the duty imposed by the Act.

| Table 2 Scottish local authorities: usual practice in awarding priority need: Age 16-17 years |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 16-17 year olds: Local authority usual practice | Very few accepted | Significant minority accepted | Slight Majority Accepted | Most/all accepted | N |
| Before Homelessness Act 2003 | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 14 |
| After Homelessness Act 2003 | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 14 |

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

There was almost universal recognition across staff in all sectors, in the three case study areas, that all homeless 16 and 17 year olds would be considered as being in priority need, as per legislative change. One homelessness worker in London argued that there were degrees of vulnerability, even among this age group, however the authority now accepted all 16/17 year olds as vulnerable. Hostel workers in the London Borough reported seeing a big increase in the number of 16 and 17 year olds being accommodated, and reported that they had not been well prepared to cope with the change. It was also reported that some young people were very well
aware of how the new legislation worked, ‘Six kids turned up with the same note’ (London homelessness worker). The reception area was seen to be used by young people who knew each other from school for swapping information and homelessness stories. Staff expressed some sadness that young people of 16 years knew the system quite so well. A voluntary sector worker in the Midlands City acknowledged that most 16 and 17 year olds who presented appeared to be accommodated that day, and that the age group definitely was awarded priority. Homelessness workers confirmed that 16 and 17 year olds were now automatically awarded priority need, with no further test of vulnerability. The Midlands City was expanding emergency accommodation provision for those aged under 18 years. Support needs were assessed at an early stage and homelessness workers would discuss a range of local supported accommodation options. Young people would usually receive support from the supported accommodation agencies, rather than directly from the homelessness service. In the Scottish City staff recognised that 16 and 17 year olds had complex reasons for presenting, and voluntary sector projects also reported working with higher numbers of 16 and 17 year olds.

**Young people with a care history**

Table 3 shows that over half of English local authorities said they accepted a majority of care leavers aged 18-20 years as having priority need, prior to the 2002 legislation. Post-legislative change this increased to 83% with 67% saying they accepted all or most young people in this category. The impact of legislative change appears to have been significant for those with a care background. This may also reflect changes in social services legislation and greater emphasis in policy and practice more generally, towards supporting young people leaving care and protecting them from homelessness. However, the change has been less significant for the older age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care Leavers age 18-20 years:</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority usual practice</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers
Table 4 shows that just over a third of English local authorities said they accepted most or all homeless 21-24 year olds with a care background as having priority need, compared to two thirds for the 18-20 age group. Nevertheless, the overall proportion of authorities saying they accepted most 21-24 year olds with a care background increased from 41% pre-legislative change, to 68% post-legislative change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care background 21-24 years</th>
<th>Very few accepted %</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted %</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted %</th>
<th>Most/all accepted %</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

In Scotland, the Homelessness Act of 2003 appears to have had very little impact on the award of priority need to care leavers aged 16-17 years as 92% of respondents reported that they already operated in this way (Table 5). There was a more noticeable impact for the 21-24 age group where the proportion reporting they awarded priority need status to the majority of this group increased from 61% to 71% (Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care Leavers 18-20 years: Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted %</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted %</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted %</th>
<th>Most/all accepted %</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers
In the London Borough, voluntary sector staff felt that young people aged 18-24 years who had formally been in care remained a less evident client group in hostels and still did not get enough support for living independently. It was reported that care leavers did use the Midlands City day centre, but that, again, there was little evidence of change resulting from the new legislation.

... on the contact form that we fill out, with any new contact we ask if they are a care leaver, and from our experience it has not made much difference if they are a care leaver between 18 and 20 when trying to get some accommodation through the City council. But you know, that’s in my experience, but I wouldn’t say it has enabled us to see that age group as priority if they’re care leavers. (Day centre worker, Midlands City).

In contrast, Midlands City homelessness workers were very clear that care leavers over 18 years, who were a ‘relevant child’, would be a priority need up until aged 21 years. The social services worker reported that overall, the Midlands City tried to prevent homelessness for care leavers, through a planned move to independence and awarding priority for housing. Very good links with the housing allocations team were reported, with the leaving care team receiving offers of good quality accommodation, quickly, for young people leaving care. Sometimes the system did not go to plan and homelessness did result, in which case social workers would work with housing services to resolve the homelessness. It was reported that young people aged 18-24 would be considered vulnerable if they had been in care. The Midlands City strategy worker confirmed that giving young care leavers the additional label of homelessness was considered inappropriate and the policy was to re-house them by direct referral, in order to avoid homelessness: ‘the homelessness route should only be a safety net, for those in a crisis’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care background 21-24 years: Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted %</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted %</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted %</th>
<th>Most/all accepted %</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

Table 6 Scottish local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Care background 21-24 years
Young people who have been in the forces or in prison

The impact of legislative change appears to have been much less significant for other groups known to be at a high risk of homelessness. For example, the proportion of English local authorities saying they accepted most homeless people aged 18-24 who had been in the forces as having priority need only increased from 22% pre-legislative change, to 30% post-legislative change (Table 7). Despite the new legislation, and the body of evidence on risk associated with discharge from the forces, the majority of respondents still did not routinely award priority need status to this category of young people.

Table 7 English local authority usual practice in awarding priority need:
Former members of the Armed Forces 18-24 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former Armed Forces 18-24 years: Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

Similarly, young people who have been in prison and then apply as homeless have not fared well under the process of legislative change in England. There remains great reluctance among local authorities to recognise having been in prison as a factor in vulnerability decisions. Before the 2002 legislation, only 13% of authorities said they accepted most young people who had been in prison as vulnerable and this only increased to 22% (Table 8).

Table 8 English local authority usual practice in awarding priority need:
Former prisoners 18-24 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former prisoners 18-24 years: Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers
In Scotland, legislative change appears to have pushed the proportion of authorities likely to award priority need to those who had been in the forces to well over half (58%, Table 9), with a similar proportion awarding priority need to most young homeless people who had been in prison (61%, Table 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9 Scottish local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Former members of the Armed Forces 18-24 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Former Armed Forces 18-24 years</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10 Scottish local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Former prisoners 18-24 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Former prisoners 18-24 years</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

In the case study areas, few staff reported any significant experience of assessing vulnerability for young homeless people who had previously been in the Armed Forces. With respect to young people who had been in prison, again, in London, this did not appear to be a significant client group of the homelessness service. In Scotland, it appeared that the homelessness service would consider a young person’s housing situation prior to prison, rather than on discharge, when deciding on vulnerability. However, some voluntary workers considered that as time in prison extended, it was more likely that someone would be considered vulnerable. In the Midlands City, homelessness workers reported that the judgement of priority need would depend on the extent to which young homeless people who were former prisoners were institutionalised by their past experience. Staff would liaise with a probation officer or CJIT (Criminal Justice Intervention Team) worker, drugs workers,
or other relevant agencies in making their decision. Voluntary sector workers in the Midlands City reported working with people that had been released from prison and had nowhere to go, with limited support structures, families or friends. However, while their circumstances did appear more difficult, they did not seem to be being awarded any higher priority. One worker commented that if they didn’t get accommodation, they could easily return to crime or prostitution.

**Young people who have experienced violence**

Local authority respondents appeared much more likely to award priority need status to young people fleeing violence, in keeping with longer-term practice on domestic violence across all age groups. The proportion reporting awarding priority need to most young people fleeing violence increased from 23% pre-legislative change, to 66% post legislative change (Table 11, England). This is a much higher figure than for those who have been in prison or the armed forces, though the degree of discretion in assessing vulnerability is the same. In Scotland, again legislative change prompted an increase from an already high level of 84% of respondents saying most young people fleeing violence would be awarded priority need, up to 92% (Table 12).

**Table 11 English local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Fleeing violence, 18-24 years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fleeing violence 18-24 years: Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

**Table 12 Scottish local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Fleeing violence, 18-24 years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fleeing violence 18-24 years: Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers
In the Midlands city, voluntary sector workers reported that a large proportion of their work was dealing with relationship breakdown, including experience of violence. The local authority was not thought to be very sympathetic, unless there were children in the household. However, homelessness workers did state that priority need was automatic where young people had experienced domestic violence. Staff would not contact perpetrators but may speak to the police if an incident had been reported.

**Young people who have previously been asylum seekers**

The proportion of English authorities awarding priority to most former asylum seekers increased from 20% to 32% following legislative change (Table 13). Post-legislative change in Scotland, the proportion of respondents reporting they rarely accepted former asylum seekers fell significantly while the proportion saying they accepted most increased from zero to nearly one fifth (17%), with exactly half saying they would award priority in a majority of cases (Table 14).

**Table 13 English local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Previously seeking asylum, 18-24 years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previously seeking asylum, 18-24 years:</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority usual practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

**Table 14 Scottish local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: Previously seeking asylum, 18-24 years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previously seeking asylum, 18-24 years:</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority usual practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers
In the London Borough local authority workers reported that only a relatively small number of former asylum seekers were admitted to their hostels. It was thought that they most probably used agencies specifically for refugees and asylum seekers. Similarly, voluntary sector staff knew of the presence of asylum seekers in the Midlands City but they were not significant users of homelessness services. The social services worker in the Midlands City commented that they would assist, for example, a young asylum seeker with no appropriate adult to support them. Homelessness staff in the Midlands City reported no experience of former asylum seekers applying as homeless.

*Other young homeless people (not in the above categories)*

Young homeless people who do not come into any of the above categories of possible vulnerability remain very unlikely to be awarded priority need status, solely on the basis of their age. The proportion of English local authorities saying they would award priority to most young people in this group increased from 9% to just 12% post-legislative change (Table 15). The survey did not indicate any differentiation in practice according to age within the 18-24 band (for example, prioritising 18-20 year olds above 21-24 year olds).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18-24 years, other than above categories</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority usual practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>71 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2002</td>
<td>61 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>8 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

Post-legislative change, the proportion of Scottish local authorities who said they accepted most young people aged 18-24 years where there was no other vulnerability as being vulnerable actually decreased by 1% although there was a rise in the number saying most/all would be accepted (Table 16). Similarly, the proportion saying very few would be accepted declined but the proportion overall saying a minority would be accepted did not change. Thus, while there was some change at the margins, overall, this group were not better served post-legislative change.
Table 16 Scottish local authority usual practice in awarding priority need: 18-24 years, other than above categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority usual practice</th>
<th>Very few accepted</th>
<th>Significant minority accepted</th>
<th>Slight Majority Accepted</th>
<th>Most/all accepted</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Homelessness Act 2003</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Email survey of local authority homelessness strategy officers

With respect to this category, homelessness staff in the Midlands City reported that they assessed each application on its own merits, according to legislation and good practice guidance. For example, they would consider any physical or mental health issues or any other factors that have impacted on the life of a young homeless applicant. With respect to drug use, young people on a drug programme would now be awarded priority need, but with a requirement that they remain actively engaged on the programme. The same would apply to those with alcohol problems.

Overall, there remain differences in the degree of priority local authorities award to young people with differing characteristics. A strategy worker in the Midlands City confirmed that the level of change as a direct result of legislative change was actually quite minimal. In terms of making decisions and the process of change there was an 18 month to 2 year gap from policy to implementation. The Midlands City had anticipated change, for example, by accepting 16-17 year olds and monitoring the impact of this in advance of the formal implementation date. Numbers of presentations had increased more recently, but there had been no massive increase in the early post-implementation period. Similarly, with the 18-24 age group, there was limited change in terms of vulnerability. It was argued that this was because homelessness law had previously required authorities to consider whether someone was vulnerable in much the same way. The authority could be subject to legal challenge if, for example, they did not take appropriate account of a criminal record, or youth/immaturity. So the degree of change was not seen as highly significant.

*In any individual case you have always got to consider all the relevant circumstances. We have never been able to argue that a history of care should not be taken into account for someone aged 24.*

(Strategy worker, Midlands City).
Some voluntary sector workers in the London Borough felt that homelessness assessment decisions were dependent on individual case workers and lacking in consistency. In particular, some staff were more insistent about legal documentation being provided prior to assisting. Another difficulty raised by voluntary sector workers in London was that young people did not necessarily disclose all relevant information.

These findings need to be contrasted with the overall positive view of legislative change on the part of local housing strategy officers. In the email survey, the process of strategic planning for homelessness was viewed positively in England and Scotland. The new strategic approach was seen as providing clarity of purpose, focus for service development, a driving force for improvement and identifying gaps in provision. More than 80% of respondents thought that their services to young homeless people had improved post-legislative change and local authorities were broadly supportive of the legislative changes.

Local authorities were asked about their overall responses to the recent legislative changes (Table 17 & 18). In England, three fifths of respondents (61%) felt the changes were about right, although nearly one third (32%) felt they gave too much priority to young people. In Scotland, more than four fifths (82%) of respondents agreed that the legislative change gave about the right level of priority to young people with nearly three quarters (72%) supportive of all or most of the changes (Table 18).

### Table 17 English local authorities: overall assessment of legislative change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall assessment of legislative change post 2002</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes have given too much priority to young people</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes have given about the right level of priority to young people</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes do not give enough priority to young people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to say</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local homelessness strategy officers

### Table 18 Scottish local authorities: overall assessment of legislative change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall assessment of legislative change post 2003</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes have given too much priority to young people</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes have given about the right level of priority to young people</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes do not give enough priority to young people</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to say</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: email survey of local homelessness strategy officers

However, there was concern among survey respondents that the award of priority need status to all 16 and 17 year olds, to an extent, further encouraged the process of leaving home due to conflict with parents. An unintended outcome could be
increased numbers of young people coming into an environment of temporary accommodation and homelessness culture which may not be entirely beneficial to them in either the short or long term. Services and responses needed to be very carefully balanced and delivered to strike the right balance between protecting vulnerable young people from homelessness and actually supporting an unplanned and high risk move away from the parental home.

Overall there was a call for more resources for implementation, as summarised by one Scottish respondent:

_The homelessness legislation, when fully in place, will see the end of people in the area being housed from waiting lists. We are already receiving twice the number of homelessness presentations as we get in empty homes each year. As the priority groups extend, we will not be able to cope. People on the waiting list have traditionally been able to wait the 3-5 years for housing but in some areas (especially for 1 bedroom properties) the waiting list is now well in excess of 20 years. As a result, this will push people through the ‘homeless route’ and increase further the homelessness presentations for this area.’_ (Respondent: email survey of Scottish local authorities).

**Conclusion**

Since 1977, the UK homelessness legislation has enshrined ‘priority’ and ‘non-priority’ need groups, creating and perpetuating divisions in who does and does not access housing under this statute. The post 2000 legislative changes have been almost universally welcomed as a step towards expanding the scope of ‘priority need’ and so making the safety net fairer in relation to the groups most at risk of homelessness. Only in Scotland, however, is there a proposal to abolish the priority/non-priority distinction by the year 2012 and to move to a position where all homeless households will be treated equally.

Overall, Scottish local authorities appear to have more progressive approaches in the use of their discretion to house young people. However, in progressing towards the abolition of priority need by 2012, local authorities have retained discretion over which households they prioritise and there is no guarantee that young people will be assisted.

The broad change to a strategic approach has been universally welcomed and reported to have had a positive impact on service provision for young people. On the whole, statutory authorities have been supportive of legislative change and have endeavoured to implement good practice.
The most significant changes in practice and in outcomes have clearly been for the 16-17 year age group, where the award of priority need status is now mandatory. Where the assessment of vulnerability remained discretionary, young homeless people seemed to face much the same outcomes pre- and post-legislative change. Most notably, young people who have been in prison still seem to be at a high risk of homelessness and have a low probability of being considered vulnerable and in priority need.

The research reported here demonstrates that despite the good intentions of legislation, the process of change is slow and very gradual. The fine detail of legislative change and the degree of discretion left to individual homelessness officers means that only a relatively small proportion of young people can be clearly shown to be better off under the new regulations. Young people who are vulnerable in all sorts of ways, but who do not meet the strict priority need criteria or a local interpretation of vulnerability still fall through the safety net. This rationing approach at front-line service level, contrasts strongly with the hypothetical inclusive approach at strategic level and demonstrates that an implementation gap remains between the rhetoric of national and local strategies and the reality of day to day implementation. The outcome is that vulnerable young people remain confused regarding their rights to housing and may be denied access to housing to which they should be entitled.

There is, of course, a legitimate debate to be had around the balance between prescription and discretion in policy and implementation. However, early experience of homelessness is known to damage young lives over the long term in terms of education and work, relationships and independent living – as well as in terms of housing careers. If the UK national government wishes to protect its future citizens from the damaging consequences of homelessness, and to build a fully inclusive society – then the priority/non priority division in the homelessness legislation needs to be abolished sooner rather than later for young people across the whole of the country.
Acknowledgements

This essay is based on a paper presented to the third meeting of the Working Group on Welfare Policy, Homelessness and Social Exclusion, at the European Network for Housing Research Conference, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2006. During 2004-2006 this working group was convened by Isobel Anderson and Henk Meert.

The empirical research is drawn from a study for the UK housing campaign organisation, Shelter (Anderson, I. and Thomson, S., 2005, More priority needed: the impact of legislative change on young homeless people’s access to housing and support. London: Shelter). I would like to thank Shelter for funding and publishing the original research and to acknowledge Stephen Thomson’s significant contribution to the project.
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

References


Pathways through Homelessness: Theoretical Constructions and Policy Implications

Eoin O’Sullivan

Introduction

In 2005, Housing Studies published an important contribution to the increasingly influential view that homelessness is best understood as a fluid and dynamic process, which intellectually could be conceptualised within a ‘pathways’ framework most clearly articulated by the work of Clapham (2002). Henk Meert and Marie Bourgeois in their paper ‘Between rural and urban slums: A geography of pathways through homelessness’ aimed to ‘provide insight into the motivations and objectives of homeless people themselves (the agency perspective), while on the other hand identifying structural obstacles that risk reproducing homelessness as a social product’ (2005: 110). Their findings highlighted the mobility of homeless people and the degree structural forces shaped mobility, alongside the role of state agencies. Henk and Marie’s paper provides a theoretical framework that allows for a focus into dimensions of homelessness, in particular, a crucial area of concern for policy makers: how individuals exit homelessness. This chapter aims to elaborate on the contribution made by Henk Meert and Marie Bourgeois by reviewing selectively the now considerable literature that draws, explicitly and implicitly, on an understanding of homelessness as a dynamic process, and that focuses not only on routes into homelessness, but more importantly, on routes out of homelessness.

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1 Senior Lecturer, School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Republic of Ireland, and a member of the co-ordinating team of the European Observatory on Homelessness.
Understanding Homelessness

From the early 1980s onwards, research on all aspects of homelessness multiplied in both North America and in most western European countries. This in part mirrored the growth of visible homelessness in these countries and the increasingly heterogeneous composition of the homeless population during this period. Not surprisingly, a large segment of the research focused on enumerating the homeless population and proposing policy solutions to ameliorate their obvious extreme marginalisation. However, definitions of what constituted homelessness were contested, as were the causes of homelessness, issues that remain largely unresolved to-date (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Brousse, 2004).

Research on homelessness in both the United States (e.g. Bahr, 1973) the UK (e.g. Cook, 1975) during the 1960s and 1970s had focused on the characteristics of the inhabitants of ‘Skid Row’; areas of cities where homeless men clustered. Homelessness, in these studies, was largely understood as a process of disaffiliation from society because of the individual deficits of the homeless themselves, although more radical perspectives were also evident which highlighted the relationships between the homeless and their agents of social control (e.g. Archard, 2).

Homelessness has been generally viewed as a phenomenon that has primarily affected men. Historically and contemporaneously, both in policy provision and the literature on homelessness, homeless men have been the primary objects of concern. This is not to say that women were not homeless, rather that they were conceptualised as something other than homeless. It is only in the past two decades that homeless women have been recognised as that; homeless rather than victims of domestic violence or inadequate or deviant. There are perhaps two broad explanations for this. Firstly, homeless women were viewed as deviant, both statistically and in terms of their reasons for homelessness. As a consequence, a range of specialised institutions were developed for the regulation of these undomesticated women and thus were recategorised as something other than homeless. Secondly, both in ideology and practice, the women’s place was within the home and for those who wished to escape from it, the options was severely limited and those who transgressed these norms, stigmatised. These two factors reinforced each other and as a consequence early studies of homelessness assumed that homelessness was primarily a male issue, and if women were encountered, were errant and particularly undersocialised. Garrett and Bahr in their pioneering studies of homeless women suggested that the pathways to homelessness differed between men and women and that ‘failure in marriage may every well be a key variable in explaining the ‘skid careers’ of women, while among homeless men it seems to play a relatively minor role’ (1976: 380). This and other early research, in Stoner’s view ‘supported views of homeless women as derelict eccentrics who choose their lifestyle… and to consolidate long held beliefs that homeless women are even more derelict and eccentric than homeless men, and thus the most socially undesirable of all marginal people’ (1983: 570).

The leading exponent of this perspective was Howard M. Bahr and his associations. His formal definition of disaffiliation was ‘homelessness is a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures’ (1973: 17).
1979). However, as the numbers of visible homeless grew during the 1980s, individualistic explanations became increasingly difficult to support and structural explanations came to the fore which highlighted the impact of changes in the labour and housing markets, in addition to welfare state readjustments as drivers of the increase in homelessness (e.g. Bohanon, 1991; Elliot and Krivo, 1991). While structural accounts were a necessary corrective to the individual pathology explanations, they in turn failed to adequately explain why only some households who found themselves exposed to growing unemployment, increasing poverty and a shortage of affordable housing became homeless. In recent years, social science research on homelessness has increasingly come to understand homelessness as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between individual deficits and structural change (Anderson and Christian, 2003). From this understanding of homelessness, a broad conceptual framework emerged that aimed to understand pathways into and out of homelessness underpinned by the notion of a homeless ‘career’.

The notion of a career stands in contradistinction to understandings of the homeless as static entities. As Cloke et al (2003: 32) argue, for those deemed homeless at a point in time, we need to understand that their ‘homelessness, mobility and spatiality shifts over time, often charting complicated pathways into and out of different accommodation, different ‘resting places.’ Much of the existing research on homelessness relates to those households who are either long-term homeless or repeatedly use homeless services. In contrast, as Caton et al (2005: 1753) highlight, ‘[l]ittle is known about the characteristics of people who stop using homeless services after a short time’ Thus, the ‘career’ concept emerged as research became methodologically more sophisticated, and moved away from cross-sectional or point-in-time surveys to longitudinal approaches (Wong, 1997). In doing so, researchers became increasingly aware that households moved into and out of homelessness on a more frequent basis than cross-sectional studies revealed. Cross-sectional research, primarily utilising structured face-to-face interviews, provided information on the ‘demographics and disabilities’ (Snow et al, 1994: 462) of the homeless, but in the process distorted the reality of the situation.

These distortions arose from four methodological and interpretative tendencies in the research; the very nature of cross sectional research; the inappropriate use of instruments of psychiatric evaluation; the medicalisation of the issue and the absence of a contextualising framework. Consequently, much of the existing research gave:

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4 One of the reasons for the disjuncture between studies that highlight personal inadequacies as the principal explanation for homelessness and those which privilege structural explanations is in part explained by the unit of observation. Studies that focus on homeless individuals as the unit of observation tend to find personal inadequacies predominate, whereas studies that focus on rates of homelessness tend to find that structural factors, in particular housing factors such as vacancy levels or rent levels dominate (see O’Flaherty, 2004 for further details).
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

... a truncated, decontextualized, and over pathologised picture of the homeless, a picture that tells us relatively little about life on the streets as it is actually lived and experienced and that glosses over the highly adaptive, resourceful, and creative character of many of the homeless, some of which may in fact be mistakenly perceived as pathological (Snow et al, 1994: 469).

Not only did the methodological limitations of cross-sectional research generate results that distorted the reality of homelessness, in addition, cross-sectional research, according to Wong (1997: 13), ‘has little relevance to social policy making because of its inability to identify antecedents that may be associated with the duration, ending, and recurrence of homelessness’. More importantly, as Phelan and Link (1999: 1337) argue: ‘[p]oint-prevalence bias leads to the confounding of causes of the occurrence of an event with the cause of its persistence’ and ‘[o]ne consequence of confounding incidence and course is that it can lead us astray in designing interventions. If mental illness and substance abuse are not important initial causes of homelessness, preventative policies focusing on such factors will have a limited impact on its incidence’ (Phelan and Link, 1999: 1338). Thus, the host of factors that can result in individuals entering homelessness were not necessarily the same as the factors that resulted in individuals remaining homeless, or indeed exiting homelessness.

In addition to the issues highlighted above, cross-sectional studies over-estimated the severity of homelessness, as at any point in time, those who are long-term or chronically homeless will be overrepresented in such research. Emerging longitudinal research highlighted the dynamic nature of homelessness with the majority both entering and exiting homelessness relatively speedily. In broad terms, three sub-sets of the homeless population could be identified: those who were long-term users of emergency services and/or rough sleepers; those who had ongoing episodic bouts of homelessness and those who were temporarily homeless, but rapidly exited and did not return to homelessness. Approximately 80 percent of the homeless were in the final category. These research findings, which broadly applied to both homeless individuals and homeless families, albeit with some important differences, demonstrated that the majority of individuals and households did and could exit homelessness. Thus, understanding the conditions for successful long-term exiting from homelessness came to the fore of researchers and indeed policymaker’s agendas (Culhane and Metraux, 2008; Culhane et al, 2007a). For

5 However, because the majority of the longitudinal studies to-date draws on shelter utilization data, they may not fully capture those homeless who avoid shelters and sleep rough. Those that sleep rough are more likely to be consumers of alcohol and to have experienced court ordered psychiatric treatment than shelter users (Larsen et al, 2004). While robust research on the characteristics of those who sleep rough rather than use shelters is spare, research in Scotland and England has highlighted that sleep rough ‘do so intermittently and might be better characterised.
example, in relation to youth homelessness, Toro et al (2007: 7) in their probability sample of 249 homeless young people, commenced interviewing when the sample were aged between 14 and 17 and have re-interviewed the same sample six times over a seven year period, with the sample now aged between 20 and 24. Strikingly, after 4.5 years, only 7 percent of the sample was still homeless with the remaining either living with their parents (33 percent), living independently (34 percent) or living with friend’s relatives (21 percent). In a similar vein Rosenthal et al (2007) in their longitudinal study of homeless young people in the Los Angeles and Melbourne demonstrate that rates of drug dependency, mental illness or both were very low in both samples and that both conditions declined over time. As the authors stress, these findings ‘reinforce the view that homeless young people are capable of change in a positive way’ (2007: 78).

From an almost exclusive focus on routes or pathways into homelessness, a focus on routes out of homelessness emerged as it became clear that homelessness was more likely to be temporary rather than a progression towards more extreme forms of homelessness. In addition, while not denying the importance of preventing homelessness, it was clear that doing just that was more problematic than often presumed. As Shinn et al (2001: 96) have argued in relation to the United States, ‘current efforts to prevent homelessness are largely based on questionable premises. Tributes to their effectiveness are statements of faith that cannot withstand scientific scrutiny. (Most such efforts do useful things for needy people but have only a marginal impact on the prevention of homelessness).’ Thus, homelessness is increasingly understood as a complex, differentiated and multi-causal phenomenon.

This analysis, however, poses a number of largely unresolved crucial questions about the phenomena under examination. In addition to understanding the diversity of the homeless experience, Pleace (1998) argues that it is mistaken to study homelessness as a phenomenon in its own right; rather it should be studied as one of the concrete manifestations of social exclusion. Pleace (2005: 5) argues for a complex definition and suggests that any meaningful notion of homelessness needs to be disaggregated as a population without permanent housing who sometimes sleep rough’ (Fitzpatrick et al, 2005: 15; see also Anderson, 2007).

The social science understanding of the routes into homelessness that dominated until the 1980s is neatly summarized by Caplow (1970: 7) who argued that: ‘[w]hether the homeless man is described as undersocialised, sociopathic, anomic, non-affiliated, kin-isolated, attitudinally passive, non-addictively alcoholic, having a negative ego-image, or economically marginal, the diagnosis reflects substantial agreement about his condition and its origins. The typical homeless man has had a long history of social under nourishment, which has discouraged him from seeking satisfaction in family relationships, self-improvement, voluntary associations, or work. Alcohol has played a large part in his life, either to dissolve his social relationships or to console him for their absence’.

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‘into meaningful and verifiable groups of people with shared pathways into and through homelessness’. Such an approach would seek to identify distinct sub-populations within the overall homeless population rather than examining homelessness as a self-contained category. The category “homeless” is further divided by gender, age, location, response, and so on. The complexity perspective is also informed by the view that explanations of homelessness cannot be directly inferred from the individual characteristics of homeless persons. In other words, for every homeless person with characteristics such as a care history, family breakdown, physical or sexual abuse, offending behaviour, lack of social support networks, and so on, there is a further unquantifiable, but nonetheless large number, who have some, if not all, of these characteristics, who are not homeless. Taking a broader historical perspective, Hopper (2003: 18-19) observes that,

It would take an elastic notion of homelessness to accommodate this unwieldy mix of station and circumstance. Indeed, the suspicion quickly mounts that seeking to impose order on the hodgepodge of dislocation, extreme poverty, migrant work, unconventional ways of life, and bureaucratic expediency that have, at one time or another, been labelled homeless may well be a fool’s errand. Pathology, deviance, moral weakness, unreason, resistance, and victimization have all had their day as reigning constructs. Their proponents remain active in contemporary debates, selecting from among the available data evidence in support. Not surprisingly, they often appear to be talking past one another – if, that is, they are talking about the same thing.

Thus, the extraordinary diversity of those who are classified as homeless needs to be incorporated into any fully-fledged theoretical and methodological framework that aims to understand homeless pathways, acknowledging that the experience of both entering and exiting homelessness will be structured by age, gender, ethnicity, geography etc.

**Housing and Exiting Homelessness**

Contemporary social science research has placed housing centre stage in preventing homelessness, exiting homelessness and achieving residential stability, and the issue of providing housing for those that find themselves homeless is, in itself, relatively uncontroversial. However, how best to assist homeless people to achieve sustainable secure housing is subject to considerable debate (Hopper and Barrow, 2003). Two broad models of housing support can be discerned, in large part, based on the experience of providing housing for those with a mental illness. One model argues that those who are homeless require a large degree of support in the form of training, detoxification, counselling, therapy, etc. to achieve housing readiness. The other model argues that homeless individuals should firstly be
housed, and then issues such as mental illness, addiction, employment support etc., can be appropriately addressed if required. In practice, many variants of those models are evident (Locke et al, 2007)

According to Hoch (2000) the purpose of providing a continuum of care for homeless people is fundamentally based on a model of social improvement. Homeless people are initially provided with emergency accommodation and once stabilized, provided with transitional housing, which will include a range of support services depending on their needs ranging from counselling to addiction treatment to employment support. After this period of intensive support, the formerly homeless person is now equipped with the skills necessary to obtain accommodation and employment. The accommodation sourced is usually subsidised or supported. However, reviews of the operationalization of the continuum of care model highlight that substantial difficulties exist in achieving both exits from homelessness and residential stability. The key difficulties surround the exclusion of homeless persons from both the first stage of continuum, emergency accommodation, and the second stage, transitional housing. Wong et al (2006: 88) in their review of 300 programmes operating a continuum of care model posed the question; were service providers ‘in fact “creaming off” the best functioning individuals among the homeless, while denying critical services to those most in need for service-rich housing placements’. In addition to the exclusionary practices, the authors also highlighted the considerable restrictions on the liberty of homeless persons when in transitional housing.

Detailed scrutiny of a similar model in Sweden, the ‘Staircase of Transition’, by Sahlin (2005) recorded similar results. The model, as the staircase metaphor implies, views exiting homelessness as a career progression ascending from emergency hostels to transitional housing to regular housing. As individuals ascend the ladder, ‘the better their conditions in terms of physical standards and space, integrity, freedom, and security of tenure. Meanwhile, social workers monitor their efforts and progress in resolving “underlying problems (like debts, substance abuse, unemployment etc), and provide ‘training in independent living”’ (2005: 117). However, the model also allows individuals to descend the ladder if they do not fulfil the required expectations at the different stages of the ladder. Evaluation of the model has highlighted that few homeless individuals fully ascend the ladder and indeed, the model, rather than ameliorating homelessness, reinforces it. It does so by reinforcing and emphasising the deficiencies amongst homeless people through a process of surveillance and control that reinforces the view that homeless individuals are incapable of independent living. Through infractions of regulations or the inability to meet predefined outcomes, homeless individuals remain marooned in a secondary housing market with little likelihood of a successful exit. A crucial failing of such models is that in attempting to prepare individuals for independent accommodation, both the tutelage, and
demonstrations of successful adaptations in response to the tutelage, takes place in a milieu that is least likely to prepare individuals for independent living. As Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin (2007: 87) have argued,

Although homeless people might need to prepare for future regular housing, there is no reason why this should take place in a hostel. Learning how to dwell in an institution does not facilitate independent living, conversely, it might entail opposite results: institutionalisation, secondary adaptation and stigmatisation. Successful strategies to provide ‘housing first’ cast additional doubts over the idea that housing requires exercise, preparation and support somewhere else than in a permanent dwelling. In addition, there is no reason why social support could not be just as well (or better) provided if homeless individuals have self-contained dwellings. In general, support works better if recipients want it or at least accept it, and when it is detached from force and control.

In addition, research, has suggested that services for homeless people, particularly emergency shelters, are located in geographical areas where multiple problems exist, often decaying inner city enclaves, which can further entrench individuals in homelessness through lack of employment or other opportunities (Huey, 2007). This situation is exacerbated by recent legislative changes that have restricted the use of public space in North America and Europe (Doherty et al, 2008; Meert et al, 2006). More generally, studies of hostels for adults have highlighted their institutionalising features, often referred to as ‘shelterisation’ (Dordick, 1996; Hopper, 2003; Marcus, 2003), which contribute to miring individuals in a state of homelessness (Stark, 1994).

Culhane et al (2007: 31) in reviewing studies of the cost-effectiveness of various services note that while ‘a small segment of the homeless population consumes most of the homeless system resources and is likely to be unable to exit without significant housing and service supports….the vast majority of homeless people overall would seemingly require less intensive interventions.’ Culhane and Metraux (2008: 115) observing that chronic shelter users, while accounting only for 10 percent of the shelter population, accounted for 50 percent of shelter usage and given the high cost of providing emergency accommodation have argued that ‘it is not substantially more expensive to house the chronically homeless who have extreme services needs than to leave them homeless’. Indeed, some commentators have expressed the view, particularly in relation to homeless families, the only support they require is a housing subsidy and that the role of services is largely inconsequential. However, Bassuk and Geller (2006: 797) have suggested caution in relation to the efficacy of either model noting that ‘[u]ntil we have more informa-

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7 Culhane et al (2007) observe that the majority of cost-benefit analyses of homelessness focus on the homeless mentally ill and this it is difficult to generalise to the overall homeless population,
tion about outcomes, policy makers cannot make informed decisions about which housing or service approaches are cost-effective and which produce the best outcomes for different subgroups of homeless families. Despite this caveat, the growing body of evidence is that the provision of secure housing is more significant in achieving residential stability and ensuring that individuals do not return to homelessness than any other intervention and that enhanced service provision is only effective in specific contexts (Nelson et al., 2007; Milby et al., 2008). This emerging research consensus poses difficulties for many traditional service providers and the admonishment of Glasser and Bridegman, (1999: 114-115) may be all the more relevant today than when they suggested that:

... we could do more to extend the study of homelessness to the study of the vast network of service providers, a network which is sometimes sardonically referred to as “the shelter industry.” It is the people in this network who daily influence the quality of life of the homeless and who are looked upon by the public at large as the main source of knowledge about homelessness.

This may be particularly the case for women and their children. Smith and North (1994) have argued that mothers with their children may benefit more from increased attention to social services. Passaro has argued that this is because:

Homeless women... are seen as the apotheosis of Woman – dependent, vulnerable, frightened. They benefit from traditional gender ideologies because their individual failures are not compounded by gender failure – a dependent, needy woman, after all, is no challenge to dominant beliefs. Homeless women quickly learn that to work their way through the system, from emergency shelter through transitional housing to, ultimately, an apartment – they need to behave in such a way as to appear ‘worthy’. Many, therefore, act meek, don’t cause trouble, and are grateful for help while in the sight of shelter officials or others who may decide their fates. The homeless women who do not play this game often find themselves having as few options as men (1996: 2)

Strands of Pathways Research

Within the broad family of research into homeless pathways, a number of distinctive theoretical traditions are evident and in turn, these theoretical traditions have guided the methodological approach of these studies (Pinkney and Ewing, 2006). In broad terms, we can identify firstly, an interactionist strand with an emphasis on qualitative, and largely ethnographic methods of research; secondly, a strand that develops the concept of housing careers, theoretically influenced by postmodernism and the emergence of a risk society and utilizing qualitative interview research methods; a third strand, which is more positivistic in orientation and
utilises quantitative methods, either via survey research or more recently drawing on large scale administrative databases. Both the first and third strand is most developed and influential in the US, with the second strand most influential in the UK, Ireland and Australia.

In attempting to explain the differing research traditions in two of the above mentioned countries, the US and the UK, Fitzpatrick and Christian (2006) note that researchers of homelessness in the UK tend to have academic backgrounds in social policy and housing whereas, in the US, academic backgrounds in psychology, social work and medicine tend to dominate research on homelessness. Methodologically, this situation has broadly resulted in quantitative methods dominating US research, with qualitative methods featuring most prominently within the UK studies. These shifting and differing theoretical and methodological approaches have resulted in differing understandings of homelessness. Explanations for homelessness in the US, particularly for families with children, highlight structural factors, specifically the role of the housing market and the lack of affordability of rental housing, over individualist explanations. In Britain, a move is evident that highlights the individual support needs of homeless persons alongside a clear policy message that homelessness is more than simply a housing problem.

**Homeless Careers: An Interactionist Account**

Much of the work of this strand draws theoretically on the work of Howard Becker. Becker developed the concept of ‘career’ in aiming to explain how individuals became ‘deviant’ or non-conforming. Methodologically, Becker rejected models of human action that viewed actions emerging from simultaneous forces and instead argued for the importance of sequential causes. In other words, a career has a number of sequences and each one is equally important in framing the eventual outcome, whereby the individual can pause, progress or return along the career path. Importantly, for Becker (1963: 34), the concept of a career incorporates the notion of ‘career contingency’. By this, he means ‘the factors on which mobility from one position to another depends. Career contingencies include both objective facts of social structure and changes in the perspectives, motivations, and desires of the individual.’ While Becker’s work was originally concerned with understanding deviance, the framework he established has proved useful in understanding the career path of homeless households, in particular, his observation that researchers

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8 Symbolic interactionism, as a sociological framework, developed in Chicago during the 1920s. Its key premise is that individuals are involved in a continuous process of interaction and interpretation of particular situations which in turn shapes understandings of social life. In the 1960s, interactionism fused with new deviancy theory to generated a range of influential works on aspects of human deviance of which Becker’s work is perhaps best known.
should not only research those who become ever embedded in a deviant career, but ‘we should also consider those who have a more fleeting contact with deviance, whose careers lead them away from it into conventional ways of life (1963: 24-25). Substitute the word deviant for homeless and the basic premise of a particular approach to homelessness research is discernible.

Recruitment to the Skid Row Subculture

Wallace9 (1968: 97) provided one of the first accounts of a typical homeless trajectory, drawing on Becker’s concept of deviant careers, in his ethnographic account of the Minneapolis Skid Row10.

Recruitment into the skid row way of life may be divided into four phases with component community and social psychological characteristics. The incipient phase involves the dislocation from the basic social network of society accompanied by a sense of rootlessness. Exposure to skid row subculture follows, accompanied by isolation and desocialisation. The third phase – regular participation in skid row institutions – witnesses the beginnings of submergence into skid row subculture. The final phase in the natural history of the skid rower is marked by his integration into the skid row community, and by his acculturation.

Wallace’s work is of note as he sympathetically juxtaposes societies understanding of an individual’s progressive decline into skid row as the gradual abandonment of wider societal norms, whereas for the skid rower it was gradual acceptance of the norms of skid row. Although Wallace traces a series of steps towards full immersion

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9 The aforementioned Howard M. Bahr also identified pathways to homelessness or disaffiliation, but drew on a very different tradition within the sociology of deviance, Merton’s concept of anomie, which aims to explain deviance as the disjunction between societal goals and the means of goal attainment. One response to this disjunction is to reject the means of achieving them, in other words to retreat from them. Merton (1938: 667) argued that included in the category of those who ‘retreat’, ‘are some of the activities of psychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts.’ Based on this analytical framework, Bahr identified three paths to disaffiliation. These were ‘external changes’ may leave an individual with few affiliations; ‘that the individual withdraws from society’; and lifetime dislocation’ (1973: 44-45). Hoch and Slayton (1989) have characterised the research by Bahr and as his colleagues as concerned with homelessness as a social problem, whereas those from the interactionist strand was concerned with understanding of the social order of homelessness.

10 Although Wallace uses the term ‘careers on skid row’, he is in fact referring to what social scientists today would refer to a ‘strategies of survival’. Peter Archard’s (1979) ethnography of London’s skid row, although drawing on symbolic interactionism and new deviancy theory, focuses largely on the strategies of survival utilised by homeless men and on how their lives are shaped by agencies of social control. As a consequence, while a path breaking corrective account of the myriad of agencies that shape the lives of homeless men, neither ‘causes’ or ‘pathways to homelessness feature in this work.
In skid row, he does acknowledge that at different stages, individuals may not progress their skid row career, but regrettably does not develop on this theme. Following Wallace, a number of other anthropologists ventured into ‘Skid Row’ to observe the ‘urban nomads’ that inhabited this space, often with a focus on their interaction with the Police. Spradley (1970 : 252) in a similar vein noted the existence of a number of possible routes into homelessness, but argued that ‘whatever the impetus, once a man moves towards the edge of this world he will be thrust to its center by repeated incarceration’. Wiseman (1970 : 16) highlighted the transience of skid row noting that ‘Skid row relationships are in a constant flux. Men come and go from the area, are arrested, are in and out of institutions, die, are kicked out of their hotel rooms, and gain and lose money, jobs and friends with a rapidity that would bewilder the more settled citizen.’ According to Nimmer (1971 : 33-34),

Skid row is a highly complex subculture, comprised of a heterogeneous population afflicted by diverse personality and physical problems and exhibiting a broad range of needs which have gone largely unfilled. Adequate understanding of the subculture and rational policy response have been hindered by a tendency to deal with parts of the problem as if they were the whole and by public ambivalence which restricts funds necessary to act comprehensively upon even the simplified solutions which have been advocated. Heavy use of alcohol, although characteristic of a major portion of the subculture and subject to being labelled a major problem, is by no means the basic skid row issue.

**Homeless career trajectories**

In one of the most detailed ethnographic accounts of homelessness to-date, Snow and Anderson (1993 : 277) note that ‘there seem to be five possible career trajectories for the homeless. Some have only brief careers on the streets. Others sink into a pattern of episodic homelessness. A third career entails permanent embeddedness in a liminal plateau typically in an institutional niche outside conventional society. A fourth career leads to chronic, unrelieved homelessness. And a final possibility involves permanent, or at least relatively long-term, extrication from street life and return to conventional society after years, or perhaps even a decade or more, of homelessness.’ In terms of their own data, Snow and Anderson highlight the extreme difficulties, particularly for those who become long-term homeless in exiting this situation. This, they argue is a combination of a gradual dislocation from resources and supports and that the fact that many services are geared to surviving homelessness rather than extricating individuals from homelessness. While they acknowledge that chronic long-term homelessness is not inevitable for those that become homeless and that episodic homelessness is common, nonetheless, they argue that repeated episodes of homelessness result in an ‘increasing physical, social, and psychological engulfment in homelessness’ (1993 : 276).
These largely ethnographic studies, particularly the American research, highlight in detail the episodic nature of homelessness and the stages in the pathway to homelessness. Nonetheless, such accounts stress the existence of a pathway, rather than pathways, albeit acknowledging that individuals may at different stages exit or pause in their journey to chronic homelessness. The various transitions described have at their core an inexorable finality, which is chronic homelessness. While offering rich and compelling accounts of pathways to homelessness amongst those who were literally homeless i.e. sleeping in the streets or in emergency shelters, such accounts overestimated the extent of a progressive decline into such forms of homelessness and underestimated the extent of exit from homelessness. This was largely a consequence of the methodology employed in such research, which resulted in an over-representation of those who were chronically homeless. Nonetheless, many of the key insights from this research was fruitfully utilised in a series of research projects that utilized quantitative research techniques with large samples of homeless individuals and households.

Homeless Careers: A Positivist Account

As highlighted above, early interpretations of a homeless ‘career’ suggested a progressive deterioration into skid row, which can be construed as a linear trajectory towards chronic homelessness. However, research in the positivist strand of homeless careers, suggests that homelessness is best understood as transitory, characterised by residential instability, rather than as an inevitable or ever-declining quality of accommodation eventually resulting in homelessness. For example, in their meta-analysis of research into homelessness, primarily in the US during the 1980s, Shlay and Rossi (1992: 141) found that:

… the average time spent homeless was just under two years; all but two studies reported that the average time spent homeless was greater than 14 months. At the same time, these studies reported that the majority of their samples were homeless for less than six months.

Furthermore, in one the first analyses of the structural determinants of homelessness in the US, Elliot and Krivo (1991) clearly identified the lack of low cost housing as a significant contributor to homelessness. More recently, Lee et al (2003) suggest that the cost of median rents and the number of single persons are the key determinants of the variation in the extent of homelessness in urban centres. In a series of studies, researchers in this tradition have attempted to understand routes into homelessness, the duration of homeless careers and the conditions required for a successful exit from homelessness. A number of panel surveys were launched in the late 1980s, which allowed for a longitudinal analysis, and from the early 1990s
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

In one of the earliest quantitative analysis of homeless careers, Piliavin et al (1993: 592-593) argued that ‘childhood placement in foster care substantially increases the length of homeless careers, second….pre-homeless psychiatric hospitalization reduces the length of homeless careers… time worked reduces the length of time homeless….several variables often viewed as important determinants of homeless careers have little effect on career length, most notable, alcohol abuse.’ This study established what was to become a reasonably robust finding in these quantitative studies: that is that individual deficits were not as significant as previously thought in determining, either entry to homeless, length of time homeless or success at existing homelessness.

Kuhn and Culhane (1998) in their detailed analysis of administrative data on shelter utilization in two North American cities, drawing on exiting conceptualizations of homelessness amongst single adults, argued for three distinct sub-groups of the homeless. They were the transitionally, episodically, and chronically homeless. Although such categories had been identified earlier, Kuhn and Culhane were able to quantify these subgroups suggesting that episodically and chronically homeless each accounted for 10 percent of the homeless population; the remaining 80 percent were transitionally homeless. The identification of these sub-groups is of importance in devising policy. As Kuhn and Culhane (1998: 228) observe:

... the transitionally homeless, by far the largest cluster, appear to be less in need of highly structured residential programs to reduce their residential instability, given their apparent capacity for independent living, as evinced by a relatively low level of shelter utilization and low rate of readmission

In relation to homeless families, which tend to be largely female headed compared to homeless individuals who tend to be largely male, a similar pattern is evident with approximately three-quarters exiting homelessness after a single episode of shelter utilisation (Culhane et al, 2007a). Interestingly, those families that stayed longest in the shelters were not those with the most severe needs, but rather that the public shelter system served as a queuing system for the scarce resource of subsidized housing in the cities studied.

Exiting Homelessness

In understanding the whether or not a household experienced an additional episode of homelessness following an initially successful exit, both Sosin et al (1990) and Piliavin et al (1996) distinguished between ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ exits. Independent exits, as the term suggests, were to generally to private accommoda-
tion, without formal support from social service type agencies and where the costs of the accommodation were largely borne by the resident, albeit with support in the form of housing allowances. ‘Dependent’ exits on the other hand ranged from transitional housing to staying with family and friends. Those who made independent exits were less likely to return to homelessness than those who made ‘dependent’ exits. This appeared to be particularly the case when accompanied by welfare support in the form of financial assistance. This led the authors to conclude that ‘accessibility and availability of sustained institutional support influence the likelihood of exits from homelessness (1996: 52). The availability of affordable housing also emerged as a key determinant of successful homeless exits in the Wong et al (1997: 459) study of family shelter users in New York who argued that ‘our data clearly indicate that subsidized housing is linked with substantially lower rate of readmission to the Family Shelter System.’ Zlotnick et al, (1999: 220) argued in a similar vein in their study of homeless exits in California that ‘entitlement-benefit income, and an exit into subsidized housing, were significantly associated with an exit from homelessness into stable housing,’ but that those homeless who were substance users were less likely to exit homelessness than those who were not (see also, Zlotnick et al, 2003). This finding may, however, be explained if service providers were less likely to provide services to those homeless who were substance abusing on the basis that they were less likely to be ‘successful’ than those homeless who were not substance abusing as suggested by Dickson-Gomez et al, (2007). In a policy context where access to housing and other related services are rationed, informal polices may operate to ‘cream’ clients.

Dworsky and Piliavin (2000: 209) further elaborate on these findings and confirm that ‘the type of housing situations to which sample members exit significantly affects the likelihood of them becoming homeless again.’ In other words, not all homeless exits are equal and greater specificity as to the nature of the initial exit could assist in predicting future returns to homelessness. Other factors that contributed to successful exits from homelessness included recent employment history and social service worker accessibility. On the other hand, ‘meeting the diagnostic criteria for a major mental illness decreases that likelihood’ (2000: 209).

In relation to the role of social service workers, the authors advise caution as they did not have robust data on the nature of the service received and what they observed ‘reflects some selection process rather than the benefits of social service intervention’ (2000: 209). In particular, they argue that the most important factor in not returning to homelessness appears to be access to a private residence11 rather than agency-managed transitional housing or informal arrangements such as

11 By this they mean private residences that individuals considered their own and for which they paid all or a substantial part of the housing costs, rather than, for example, social service agency run transitional housing,
staying with family or friends. The apparent lack of success of transitional housing in preventing returns to homelessness is compounded by other research which highlights that those homeless households who resided in service intensive homeless services did not have shorter stays than those in less service intensive projects (Gerstel et al, 1996). What the authors describe as the ‘therapeutic incarceration’ of homeless families in transitional housing, whereby a disciplinary regime was imposed to ensure adherence to the ‘life-skills’ that would prevent homelessness, actually worked to maintain dependency. This, the authors concluded was because individual deficits were not the primary reason for homelessness, rather the lack of affordable housing was.

In addition, Thompson et al (2004) highlight the importance of relationships and specific events in exiting homelessness. Relationships with family members and service providers were a crucial source of support in the process of exiting homelessness and highlight the need to ensuring these relationships are maintained rather than discouraged. This is particularly the case for family members who may have become estranged during the period of entry to homelessness. Specific events, either external or internal were also identified as contributing to exiting, such as having a child etc.

Shinn et al (1998: 1654) in their longitudinal study of 266 families that used the New York public shelter system concluded that ‘h’omelessness was a stage families passed through, and not a permanent state: four fifths of families who entered shelter had their own apartments 5 years later, and three fifths were stably housed, having been in their own residence at least one year and an average of nearly 3’. They identified the provision of subsidised housing as the single most significant predictor of housing stability and that the factors that contributed to families entering homelessness, particularly personal disorders, did not prevent exiting from homelessness to stable accommodation. Likewise, Wolf et al (2001: 396) demonstrate that ‘obtaining independent housing was associated with the largest positive and significant improvements in satisfaction with overall quality of life’ compared to those who made dependent exits.

**Gender and exiting homelessness**

Wong and Piliavin (1997) in their longitudinal study of homelessness in a Californian county, concluded that women, in particular, female headed households were more likely than men to speedily exit homelessness. This, they concluded was not attributable to a greater incidence of individual deficits amongst the homeless men in the study, rather such deficits played ‘at best a minor role in accounting for gender and family status differences in homeless spell exit rates’ (1997: 420). The explanatory factors were largely institutional, particularly the availability of cash benefits. The greater likelihood of females exiting more rapidly existing homelessness was
confirmed by Culhane and Kuhn (1998) who, using administrative data from public shelters in both New York and Philadelphia, demonstrated that over a two year period, approximately 55 percent of male and 65 percent of female shelter users had only a single episode (less than 30 days usage of the shelter system) of homelessness over a two-year period. Thus, a significant number of individuals both enter and exit homeless services relatively speedily. Those who experienced most difficulty exiting shelter services tended to be ‘older people and people with mental health problems, substance abuse problems, and in some cases, medical conditions’ (1998: 38).

Metraux and Culhane (1999: 390-91) argue in relation to homeless women that ‘having children in the household, family instability, and domestic violence – are all associated with an increased risk of their experiencing additional episodes of shelter use.’ In terms of exiting homelessness, the provision of permanent and affordable housing was found to be the single most important factor in reducing further episodes of homelessness (see also Wong et al., 1997 for a similar finding). While the authors acknowledged that the provision of such housing couldn’t in itself remedy the above risk factors, ‘it can provide an atmosphere more suitable to addressing these problems, and it can prevent a single homeless episode from becoming a series of repeat stays’ (1999: 392). Interestingly, their research questions the need for homeless women to participate in transitional housing arrangements on the basis that the evidence suggests that the provision of housing with services has equally positive outcomes, but is less expensive.

**Incarceration and returns to homelessness**

A more recent area of research in this tradition is the interaction between the growing rate of incarceration in many western countries and homelessness. A longstanding tradition in homelessness research has highlighted that the experience of homelessness was inherently criminogenic through engagement in survivalist crimes such as shoplifting, begging and larceny, and while such offences were typically minor and resulted in fines rather than an immediate prison sentence, in many instances the fines that could not be paid resulted in imprisonment.12 A further view was that prisons could be viewed as part of an institutional circuit that the homeless traversed which in addition to prison included shelters, psychiatric facilities, casual wards, hostels etc. (Hopper et al., 1997). Rather than having stable accommodation, the homeless people resided in a spectrum of institutions that regulated their behaviour and movement to varying degrees.

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12 In many countries until recently, homelessness or vagrancy itself was criminalized and resulted in imprisonment.
More recently, the experience of imprisonment has been examined as an institution that contributes to an exacerbation of homelessness rather than an outcome of homelessness. In other words, while homelessness could lead to incarceration, increasingly incarceration was contributing to homelessness (Metraux et al., 2007). Baldry et al. (2006) in Australia demonstrate that in their sample of those released from prison, homelessness increased from 18 percent who were homeless pre-prison to 21 percent post-release. In addition, being homeless after prison increased the likelihood of further incarceration. Metraux and Culhane (2004) came to a similar conclusion in the US showing that the likelihood of re-incarceration is intensified for those who had a history of homelessness before initial incarceration. Gowan (2002: 525) in her analysis of the nexus between homelessness and incarceration in two American cities argued that in relation to the men, particularly the African–American men, she studied that:

> [t]he research clearly indicates that the initial entry point into the homelessness / incarceration nexus was more likely to be incarceration than homelessness. In other words, for men entering the cycle for the first time, the road from incarceration to homelessness was more well-trodden than the road from homelessness to penal confinement. Yet once they were trapped within the cycle, causality moved both ways with equal strength, as men shuffled back backwards and forwards between the prison and the street, between punishment and abandonment by the wider society.

In their meta-analysis of research into homelessness during the 1980s, Shlay and Rossi (1992: 139-140) suggest that ‘on average 18% of the population of homeless persons had served time in prison after being convicted of a felony, and about one third of the population of homeless persons had been jailed on misdemeanour charges. An average of 41% of the population of homeless persons experienced some form of incarceration within the criminal justice system.’ In a detailed study in New York, which matched prison and jail records with those resident in public shelters for the homeless on December 1st 1997, Metraux and Culhane (2006) showed that nearly one-quarter of the shelter residents had been incarcerated in New York prison or jail in the previous 24 months. As the authors acknowledge, this may well be an underestimate, as information was not obtained on the shelter residents who had been incarcerated outside of the New York facilities. Caton et al. (2005) in a survey of newly homeless men and women who were admitted to New York City shelters in 2001 and 2002 showed that 81 percent of participants returned to community housing during the follow-up period, but arrest history was one the strongest predictors of a longer duration of homelessness. In a recent overview of the relationship between homelessness and incarceration the United States, Roman and Travis (2006: 395) suggest that ‘about 10 percent of the population coming into prisons has recently been homeless, and at least the same percentage
of those who leave prisons end up homeless, at least for some period of time’. Greenberg and Rosenheck (2008: 176) demonstrate in their national survey of jail inmates in the US that over 15 percent had been previously homeless and that ‘past incarceration, even before they became homeless, may have been a major risk of subsequent homelessness’.

The results from over a decade of research into homeless entries, homeless careers and exits from homelessness are extraordinarily consistent. Homelessness, as an objective condition, occurs episodically to a considerable minority of the population (at least in the United States). Longitudinal research shows that the majority exit homelessness relatively quickly and those most likely to exit on a permanent basis, are those who access affordable housing and/or obtain financial assistance to maintain such housing. Transitional housing schemes and other interventions that aim to train or mentor individuals to reduce their risk of homelessness are largely ineffectual, as access to housing rather than individual deficits largely determines a return to homelessness. To-date, research of the nature highlighted above is largely deployed in the United States, with little evidence of this approach to homelessness research in Europe. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, this in part reflects the differing disciplinary backgrounds of those engaged in homelessness research in Europe. This strand of pathways research is discussed in the next section.

**Homeless Careers: Postmodernity and Risk Society**

In part, this approach starts with a critique of positivist assumptions of housing consumption and the methodologies employed. The approach argues that in post-modern society, framed by globalisation and risk, researchers cannot assume universal household attitudes and motivations and that lifestyle and housing choice needs to be researched rather than assumed. To do so, requires an understanding of housing consumption as dynamic and the metaphor of a pathway is employed. Housing pathways are defined by Clapham (2002: 63; see also 2004, 2005) as ‘patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space’. Clapham describes the pathways approach, not as a theory, but as a metaphor, which assists in illuminating the changing relationships and interactions that households experience when consuming housing. To fully understand these changing relationships and interactions, he recommends employing ethnographic or biographic methods. Within the framework, homelessness can be understood as ‘an episode or episodes in a person's housing pathway’ (2003: 123). Research drawing broadly on this approach has been undertaken largely in the UK, but also in Australia.
Multiple Pathways

In one of the earliest and most detailed accounts of homelessness amongst young people, Hutson and Liddiard (1994) argued, on foot of their study of homeless young people in Wales, that homelessness needs to be viewed and understood as a progressively problematic ‘downward spiral’ consisting of three phases: ‘early’, ‘middle’ and ‘late’. Most of the young people in their study left home in an unplanned way and tended to stay with relatives or friends for a short period of time. Following this some appeared to resolve their home-based difficulties and either returned to their family or moved into private rented accommodation. Others, however, moved into the ‘middle phase’ of homelessness and lived in youth residential projects, used squats and, as time progressed, the use of adult hostels was more common. Among those who subsequently moved into the ‘late phase’ of homelessness, many were viewed as too problematic to be accommodated in youth residential projects and were either sleeping rough or staying in adult hostels. Few of these young people were employed and many were heavily involved in criminal and drug lifestyles.

More recently, additional pathways have been identified in the research. For example, Anderson and Tulloch (2000) in a review of literature could discern 23 pathways (5 specific pathways for young people; 11 for adults and a further seven for those in later life). Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2006), in Australia, identified three career typologies based on an examination of data from a national census of homeless school students, which provided 1220 case histories and 812 case histories of households on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. The three typologies were ‘youth career’ (which in turn incorporated five distinct phases and four biographical transitions); a ‘housing crisis career’ (which in turn had three phases and three transitions); and a ‘family breakdown career’ (which has four phases and three transitions). Mallett et al (2006), also in Australia identified family violence, personal / familial drug and alcohol use and desire for independence / adventure, in equal measure as the key reasons for leaving home for the 692 homeless young people they interviewed between 2000 and 2005.

Fitzpatrick’s (2000) Glasgow-based qualitative study is one the most sustained in terms of using a pathways framework aimed at examining the distinct processes and patterns of experience among homeless young people. This research described a number of homeless pathways taken by young people in an urban context, which can be summarised as follows:
1. Local youth homelessness: Mainly resulting from structural poverty leading to family friction, alternating between moving around friends’ and relatives’ houses and sleeping rough locally, with a strong attachment to the local area.

2. Using ‘official’ city homeless network: Typically young men who have had very difficult childhoods (e.g. involving physical and/or sexual abuse, the death of a parent, destructive step-relationships, and residential care). They have little or no contact with their families, little attachment to any local area, and their social networks may revolve around hostel residents. May have serious personal problems, including mental ill health and substance abuse.

3. City centre homelessness: Young people who have moved immediately to the city centre on becoming homeless. They may already know people homeless in the city centre, or fear family or others in their home neighbourhood. Their homelessness is linked to severe family problems in childhood and they have complex needs. They typically alternated between rough sleeping for extended periods in the city centre, hostel, and prison or drug rehabilitation units.

The pathways identified by Fitzpatrick were not completely separate and some young people moved from one pathway to another at different stages in their homeless career. This research uncovered a sharp distinction between city-centre and local area homelessness. Few of the young people from the local area pathway moved into patterns of homelessness, which involved sleeping rough in the city-centre. One of the major innovations of Fitzpatrick’s work is the focus on the experiences and perspectives of the young people themselves as they construct their own situation. The findings of this and other studies of homeless young people that emphasise processes and trajectories through homelessness suggest that there is a general drift towards institutional accommodation as young people’s homelessness lengthens, with adult hostels usually featuring later in young people’s homeless careers.

Karabanow (2008) outlines a six-stage exiting process for homeless young people in six Canadian cities. Stage one involves precipitating factors such as experiencing a traumatic event or simply becoming disenchanted with or bored with street life. Stage two requires ‘courage to change’ which involves a commitment to move from the streets, often resulting from the establishment of a new romantic relationship. Stage three involves securing help from statutory or NGO service providers. Stage four involves slowly breaking the links with street life and culture and developing new networks of activities and peers. To assist this process a fifth stage is required which involves changes in daily routines, such as securing employment or housing. Finally, those who successfully exited required a degree of self-esteem and stability.
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman in their lives. Each stage of the process, according to Karabanow (2008: 786), has ‘numerous challenges and obstacles, making successful exiting difficult and often including numerous trials’.

Perhaps the most detailed qualitative account of homelessness utilising in-depth qualitative interview is that conducted by May (2000). May (2000: 615) argues that, ‘for the majority of single homeless people the experience of homelessness is neither singular nor long term but episodic, with each homeless episode interspersed with often extended periods in their own accommodation and with no increase in either the frequency or duration of homeless episodes over time’. In terms of the factors determining these repeated entries into homelessness, May identifies unemployment as the single most important factor. For the majority of homeless men in May’s study, their time both prior and subsequent to each homeless episode had been spent in accommodation of their own, most often in the private rented sector. Even for long-term homeless people, May argues that no clear progressive decline was evident: ‘for some homelessness had been an almost permanent existence, for others periods on the streets or in hostels that had often lasted years were interspersed with equally long periods in their own accommodation. Further, although some of these men talked of a desire for the kind of supported housing schemes that are often advanced as a solution to those who have been homeless for a long period of time and who may also have significant and multiple vulnerabilities, by no means all embraced these schemes as an answer to their housing needs’ (2000: 634).
Conclusion

In this chapter, the various approaches to understanding homelessness within what is generally termed a pathways approach are outlined. This approach to homelessness seeks to map out and explain patterns (and changes) in the experience of homelessness over time. This approach increasingly does not assume a progressive decline from being poorly housed to temporary accommodation to street homelessness and, instead, recognises that individuals can move into and out of homelessness at different stages in their life cycle. By the beginning of the 21st century, homelessness was increasingly viewed as an objective condition that could occur for a much greater number of households than envisaged some twenty years earlier, if both individual deficits and structural adjustments interacted in specific formations. The majority of homeless households exited this state reasonably quickly, but in some cases experienced a series of further short-term homeless episodes. Others remained homeless for longer periods and this appeared to be exacerbated by individual deficits, particularly poor mental health and a lack of employment history or through negative state interventions such as imprisonment, particularly for males. The notion that individuals can move between being homeless, poorly housed and adequately or well housed is a key starting point for a complex and dynamic analysis of pathways into and through homelessness. Despite these general observations, the chapter notes that a number of distinctive strands of research are discernible with distinctive and competing theoretical and methodological approaches. In addition to academic boundaries, geographical boundaries are evident in the approach adopted.
References


In my Caravan, I feel like Superman


Urban Definitions of Places and People

Ingrid Sahlin

Introduction

Although this paper is not based on empirical research, it is influenced by accounts of a selection of cases in which the aim or result was that homeless people have been excluded from Swedish city centres. The four examples I have chosen are: conflicts between different groups of users in a suburban park; the subtle removal of a number of public benches in a gentrified area; an anti-begging project in Stockholm; and the closing at night of the central blocks in Göteborg. Thinking about these examples and some related court cases, and searching for crucial decisions and regulation that enabled and influenced this devolution, I have come to the conclusion that they all concern struggles about ‘definitions’ – of people, places and acts. Hence the title of my paper, which refers to legal and formal definitions of places and by implication, of people, as well as the ‘definition of the situation’ in the symbolic interactionist sense.

My point of departure is that the processes affecting homeless people’s place in the city on the one hand have their own dynamic, and on the other hand reflect more stable relations of power and patterns of control. The interaction of city renewal, public-private partnerships and zero tolerance in urban policing has serious implications for the homeless, who may be excluded from the commercial and cultural centres both deliberately and unintentionally. Homeless users of public space are

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2 Other versions of this paper have been submitted to the European Observatory on Homelessness in November 2006 as a “thematic paper” from Sweden, and presented at the Nordic Network for Homelessness Research Seminar in Kuopio, October 2007 and aspects of the argument presented here are included in a co-authored paper published in ‘Surveillance and Society’ (Doherty et al, 2008)
recognized as a dilemma within policy-making as well as business, although from
different (and sometimes contradictory) viewpoints. However, most parties agree
that the presence of visibly homeless people should be interpreted as a need for
containment, that is, institutions (shelters, hostels) where homeless people can be
kept and taken care of. While the social services and NGOs want to facilitate
homeless people's inclusion into society, business companies and property owners
primarily try to prevent their returning to the commercial centre. Still, since these
homeless institutions usually reject trouble-makers or expel clients as a sanction
for misconduct, and since many who need some place to stay find some of the
shelters appalling, the excluded homeless people are likely to come back to the city
centre as long as they do not have regular housing (Sahlin 2004).

The concepts border control and discipline, inspired by Foucault (1979) and his
metaphors of how cities in ancient times used to handle lepers and the plague,
respectively, have proven helpful to make sense of the different strategies of the
landlord and the social authority (Sahlin 2001). Border control consists of rejection
and expulsion of problem people in order to keep the house or area “clean”, while
discipline comprises organising and controlling people spatially, as well as supervis-
ing, controlling and training them to make them behave properly while remaining
in the community. The same strategies have been deployed as a means of keeping
order: private guards and gate-keepers employ border control to take care of a
delimited territory, while the police use discipline to keep order in public space
(Franzén 2001, Lomell 2007). These broad concepts of power and control have
been used in this book chapter to make sense of the different ways in which
homeless people in urban space have been treated.

In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, this chapter has four sections.
The first presents legal issues of relevance to understanding homeless people’s
access to (public) space. Legislation defines not only whether and in what way a
specific act is illegal, but also the conditions for police intervention and whether
(and in what sense) a place is public or private. The latter is the topic of the second
section, which also deals with the ambiguities that shape the grey zones between
public and private places and places in transition. The subject of the third section
is the fact that rules, norms and expectations regarding the usage of specific public
places may differ between different kinds of users and even contradict or challenge
each other. An obvious example is that gentrification affects the design of urban
space in a way that might deter homeless users. I suggest that the concept of
commons be applied to space that is ‘formally’ public but socially defined as ‘local’,
where settled neighbours and users want to define the ‘etiquette’ of the space. The
fourth section starts from the recognition of new actors in urban policy – private
investors, for-profit companies and public-private partnerships for city renewal,
urban development, crime prevention and safety. I claim and try to illustrate that
such neo-corporatism (Crawford 1997) entails redefinitions of indecent behaviour (e.g., begging), public streets, and crime prevention in a direction that threatens homeless users of the city centre.

Legislation

Legislation is relevant for homeless people’s presence and behaviour in public space for several reasons. If their activities are defined as crimes, they become vulnerable to police arrest, and other people’s or companies’ attempts to exclude or question their presence might be legitimised (excused or entitled). This, in turn, may foster stereotypes of homeless people as criminals and as threats to “ordinary people’s” safety. The latter reason refers to the interaction between law-making and public opinion (including powerful people’s views and interests). On the one hand, legislation may affect different parties’ behaviour and acts (which is of course one of its main purposes) and their definition of spaces and what is going on there (see Goffman 1963/1966). On the other hand, legislation may be changed, or the interpretation of it altered, as a result of debate, lobbyism, pressure, cooperation, informal cooptation and other close interaction between various stakeholders and representatives of public authorities and experts. Finally, the legal regulation of police intervention is relevant for homeless people who are seen as violating the law.

In this section, I will first define when it might be a crime to enter a place that is considered to be private or to which access is limited, and secondly, what behaviour may be regarded as a crime just because it takes place in public space. Thirdly, I will examine the legislation regarding order in public space and, finally, refer to the rules regulating police interventions.

The Penal Code: Trespassing, Intrusion, Disorderly Conduct

There are a few paragraphs in the Penal Code (Brottsbalken 1962: 700) that homeless people, who are confined to living their private lives in public, risk violating more than others. These concern breaches of domiciliary peace (hemfridsbrott), trespassing in the premises of businesses or organisations (olaga intrång), molestation (ofredande) and disorderly conduct (förargelseväckande beteende). While the first three refer to private property and/or personal privacy, the last one concerns behaviour in public space and may be a crime even if nobody is personally affected or files a complaint. Violation of the privacy of the home and intrusion are included in Section 6, Ch. 4, “Crime against Liberty and Peace”:

A person who unlawfully intrudes or remains where another has his living quarters, whether it is a room, a house, a yard or a vessel, shall be sentenced to a fine for breach of domiciliary peace.
A person, who, without authorisation, intrudes or remains in an office, factory, other building or vessel or at a storage area or other similar place, shall be sentenced for unlawful intrusion to a fine.

If the crime mentioned in the first or second paragraph is gross, imprisonment for at most two years shall be imposed.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1995 (Case No. B4354-93; NJA 1995: 13) that a person who violates a shopkeeper’s decision to blacklist him/her because of previous shoplifting or noisy behaviour is not guilty of unlawful intrusion, since a shop in this context is to be regarded during opening hours as a public place, rather than as a place for work or production. However, to enter a premise without permission when it is closed in order to find a place for rest, as rough-sleepers sometimes do, is no doubt an unlawful intrusion.

Another section in Chapter 4 of the Penal Code, sometimes suggested to apply to begging, concerns molestation (ofredande). Disorderly conduct or offensive behaviour considered to be aggravating for the public may be a crime when it takes place in public. Ch. 16, 16 § in “Crime against Public Order” states that “(a) person who is noisy in a public place or who otherwise publicly behaves in a manner apt to arouse public indignation, shall be sentenced for disorderly conduct to pay a fixed fine.” (Law 1991: 240). The content of this law is quite old and it seems not to be applied very often today; most of the recent guiding verdicts concern racist utterances or Nazi gestures in public (www.rattsinfosok.dom.se/ragrummet/index.jsp).

The Public Order Act and Local Ordinances

The current Public Order Act (Ordningslag 1993: 1617), valid since 1994, regulates the conditions and terms for public arrangements (political manifestations as well as cultural or commercial events), public places and some public transport. The second section in Ch. 1 identifies ‘public place’ (offentlig plats) as public roads, streets, squares, parks and other places that in the municipality’s planning documents are defined as public (allmän) place and are accessible for the general public. If such access pertains only to certain hours, the place is defined as public during this time.

Relevant for rough-sleeping people is the first general section on use of public places in Ch. 3, which deals with public order and security. A public place in the city “must not, without permission from the police authority, be used in a way that is not in accordance with the purpose for which the place has been let or with what is generally accepted” (1 §). The Act states further that the Government or – after having been empowered by the Government – the municipality may determine additional proscriptions for the municipality or for a part of it that are necessary to
maintain general order in public space (Ch. 3, 8 §). However, these “proscriptions must not put unnecessary coercion on the general public or imply unwarranted constraints of the individual’s freedom” (Ch. 3, 12 §).

In spite of this restriction on *general* prohibitions, the municipalities may state rules of behaviour in designated public spaces (as well as designating places as public) and, according to a verdict in the Supreme Court (Case No. B2346-95, NJA 1997: 37), the municipality may adopt ordinances that go beyond what is stated in the Public Order Act. Both Göteborg and Stockholm have restrictions against camping in public space and have decided to prohibit drinking of alcohol in a wide selection of public places, including certain parks. This kind of ordinances makes many homeless people vulnerable to police arrests.

**Seizing, Arrest and Expulsion**

According to the Police Act (1984: 387), the police may seize and eject a person or take him/her into temporary custody “If a person by his conduct disturbs public order or poses an immediate threat to the same /…/ if this is necessary to maintain public order /…/ if such a measure is required for the aversion of a punishable act” (§ 13). Thus, the police may take these actions in four kinds of situation: when order is disturbed or when there is an immediate risk of order disturbance, and when a crime is proceeding or there is a danger of a crime taking place (National Police Board 1999: 58f.). It goes without saying that the definition of a situation as a “risk of order disturbance” is a matter of judgement where there is considerable room for interpretation.3

Accordingly, the law provides the police with wide space for action and discretion, something that rough-sleepers in Göteborg frequently complained of in an interview study (Sahlin 2000). Some of them told, for instance, that the police would seize them and drive them by car out of the city, where they were let loose but had to walk for many hours to get back to the city centre again. A published “guiding sentence” by a court of appeal relates to such a case in Stockholm. The district court had found two police officers guilty of unlawful capturing since they had seized a man that they found in a building and driven him in a police car far out of the centre. The victim, who was homeless, told the court that the police had left him all alone in the woods where he could not find his way back to the city (Svea Hovrätt RH 1996: 24, Case No B1890-95). Although the Court of Appeal changed the sentence for one of the police officers from unlawful capturing to breach of duty, it concluded that it was “not compatible with the given general principles for police interventions to move a homeless person on a cold night from the place where he

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3 Targets of preventive intervention with reference to “risk” are especially vulnerable to violations of their legal rights (Horstkotte 1996).
is staying to another area – at a great distance and perhaps totally unknown to the person concerned – without making clear how he could spend the rest of the night" (Svea Hovrätt RH 1996: 24, Case No B1890-95). In their defence, the police claimed that they only ‘removed’ the man and tried to prevent him from relapsing into ‘unlawful intrusion’ in the same building again during the night. Similar explanations were given to the rough-sleepers who – irrespective of the guiding sentence – were dislocated from the shopping centre in Göteborg to a place many miles from the city centre (Sahlin 2000).

Consequently, homeless people sleeping rough or having to lead their lives in public during daytime will be at risk of breaking the law through trespassing or intrusion in search of a place to rest. Some of their activities, such as begging, drinking and sleeping, may be defined as molestation or disorderly conduct just because these take place in public space or violate local ordinances (see Baxter & Hopper 1981).

**Defining Public Space**

The definition of places as public or private is more complicated than it appears at first sight. Land or buildings owned by the municipality or the central state may very well not be public in the sense of the Public Order Act. For instance, municipal institutions and offices do not constitute public space, and dwellings owned by municipal housing companies are of course just as private as owner-occupied homes. Conversely, privately owned land may be defined as public. The problem is, though, that when public places are privately owned, the owners may try to enforce home-made rules and make their security guards act according to these, even if they are legally unfounded or downright illegal. For people in general, and especially for disadvantaged people such as homeless people, rejections and exclusions are deterring even if they are unwarranted.

An issue of interest for homeless people is the right to sell street papers in the city centres. Both Stockholm and Göteborg have decided in their local ordinances⁴ that temporary sale in public space requires permission from the police in (specified) parts of the city, with the explicit exception of the sale of printed matter. Accordingly, selling street papers is allowed. Nevertheless, vendors of the street paper Faktum in Göteborg have been repeatedly denied entrance to and ejected from public places. According to one of Faktum’s reporters, the real estate company owning Frönlunda torg, an indoor shopping centre and square in a suburb of Göteborg, expelled the vendors on the grounds that all commerce outside shops that paid rent for their premises was prohibited. Västrafik, the public transport company that controls regional buses and trains, took a similar decision regarding the bus station

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⁴ Stockholm City 2005, § 16, and Göteborg City 1999, § 12, respectively.
close to the Central Station. However, according to the police as well as the city authorities, these places are public and the vendors actually have the right to be there and sell their paper (Sernbo, 2001).

In the countryside, similar problems occur. For centuries, the public (that is, in this context, anybody) is entitled to stroll, pick flowers, mushrooms or berries and enjoy nature in other ways, even if the land is privately owned, as long as one does not enter private gardens, cause harm or make it difficult for farmers to pursue their trade. Camping, for instance, is in principle allowed in the countryside temporarily (up to three nights) without the permission of the landowner. Nevertheless, this old customary right, allemansrätten, is sometimes violated by landowners who try to keep other people out of their territory with fences, signs warning of angry bulls or stating “private land”, or simply by telling-off visitors.

**Limited public space**

In their study of local squares, Olsson, Ohlander & Cruse Sondén (2004: 277 ff.) distinguish between public space and limited public space. The latter is constrained in the sense that owners and/or employees exert control over people and activities. Three subtypes are identified: (1) shops, post offices etc. where visitors are expected to be customers and enter the premises with a certain purpose; (2) cafés and restaurants where visitors are expected to buy something to eat or drink while they are sitting down; and (3) meetings and other activities which the visitors are expected to take part in. Although the groups who predominate in these different places vary, marginalised people – almost by definition – tend to be excluded and are more often found in non-limited public space, like the square (Olsson, Ohlander & Cruse Sondén 2004). Even if it is a limited public place, the public library may be an exception as it is indeed possible to stay there for free, and reading is the only activity expected of its users.

The interaction between limited public places like restaurants and wholly public places like streets and squares has been analysed by Franzén (2001) in terms of border control and discipline. In restaurants, the proprietor can expel misbehaving customers or use gatekeepers and guards to reject unwanted guests. However, such intervention causes frustration that must be contained in the truly public space, like the pavements outside. Here, the police are responsible for keeping order but they must not intervene unless they have legal grounds for it, and they cannot exclude people from public space without a cause. Hence, they rather use discipline: supervise risky persons’ behaviour and try to distribute them in public space in a way that reduces the danger of fights and feeling unsafe.
**Ambiguities**

Limited public space may of course be more or less ‘open’ to the public and – as will be elaborated in the next section – it is sometimes a matter of interpretation whether or not a place is at all public. What Newman (1972) calls ‘defensible space’ may also be described as semi-public. Small lots of land close to dwellings tend to be looked upon and guarded as if they were private or semi-private, even though they are indeed public, formally as well as in terms of ownership. Currently, urban planning explicitly encourages this kind of appropriation as it is considered to prevent crime. If neighbours react to and tell off youngsters trying to vandalise bicycles, or grown-ups who make noise or throw litter etc., this is supposed to improve order and reduce crime. But the feelings that are provoked by somebody’s intrusion in ‘our’ territory with a criminal intent will probably also be aroused if homeless people try to spend the night, sit down or bring their things to such a space. Put differently, space seen as ‘defensible’ will probably not be taken as public.

Additional ambiguity regarding what is a ‘public place’ stems from the fact that the concept is used in different ways in the Penal Code and the Public Order Act. In the former, a shop or another indoor place may also be public, while ‘public place’ in the Public Order Act “is tied to planning and building legislation and in principle does not include indoor localities” (NJA 1995: 13). Furthermore, traditionally ‘outdoor’ space, such as squares and streets, increasingly resembles ‘indoor’ places with gates, walls and glass ceilings. This tendency may in the long run affect the legal and social conception of such places (see below on Nordstan).

Another phenomenon that fosters ambivalence, as regards a place being public or not, is what have been called ‘spaces of uncertainty’ (Cupers & Miessen 2002); that is, places which are left over when the city is planned, developed and renewed, or – perhaps more commonly – places that are ‘waiting’ for development which nobody makes claim to or takes care of. This space is sometimes useful for those of the homeless who have nowhere else to stay, meet or keep their things, but sooner or later the police, municipal authorities or property owners will try to get rid of them, for instance when neighbouring real estate is ready to be demolished or complemented. These uncertain places may be publicly or privately owned, but are not taken notice of in the planning documents or local proscriptions, and there are often no signs or implicit instructions on how they should or must not be used (Aspenström 2006).

To sum up, what kinds of behaviour are allowed or prohibited (or even criminal), whether access is open, restricted, conditioned or denied, and who may enter, remain or reside in a place, depends on whether the place is private or public, and
if public, on the specific rules and norms that are valid for the specific ‘territory’. What places are public or private, in turn, is determined partly in general terms, partly specified for a certain place – and subject to change.

Such changes are sometimes the result of political and administrative decisions in the municipality’s planning process, or reflecting its local rules of order, but may also respond and correspond to the interests of private owners or business. While many places that are wholly or partly privately owned may remain truly public, privatisation is often an element in a project of renewal and change. Private property owners or developers may be willing to invest in a planned change on the condition that the area becomes their private property, while the municipality may require in return that they arrange for some alternative public space or improve public accessibility as a precondition for the right to implement development plans. Hence, both the definition and the actual usage of a specific piece of land are often subject to negotiation. This will sometimes entail that the private owner can determine or at least influence what rules of behaviour should be valid at that spot. In addition, the balance between different parties’ responsibilities for keeping order and regular maintenance may also be a matter of negotiation.

As long as it is open to the public, the Public Order Act applies also to privately owned space. Likewise, publicly owned places (for instance an office or a shelter) may be ‘private space’ in legal terms (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Public versus private status and ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>Shopping malls</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Squares</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Work-places</td>
<td>Homes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shelters</td>
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As was obvious in the court case regarding the blacklisting of a shop’s customer, the very same place can be defined as a shop (limited public) or as a workplace (private) depending on time of the day. The kinds of places where definitions of unlawful or improper behaviour are most likely to be subject to change and discretion, and thus ambiguous to visitors as well as to owners, are those which are privately owned but defined as public by the local authorities. But there may also be different opinions regarding publicly owned places to which access is restricted.
Apart from these legal and formal ambiguities, conflicts may arise from different interpretations of places and activities. In addition, the design of the place as well as its location may deter some sections of the general public and make others feel more comfortable, which can influence the prevailing norms of behaviour regardless of legal status and ownership. This is the topic of the next section.

Defining through Design and Decorum

From the point of view of homeless people, legislation and law enforcement are not the only constraints on their everyday life and survival. More important are sometimes financial, physical or practical obstacles for their day-to-day life. For instance, the availability of public (clean) toilets, benches, paper baskets, unlocked doors and entrances and sources of heating, as well as generous opening hours in public halls and waiting rooms facilitates life without a home. Conversely, the removal of such assets or restricting access to places where they are available makes rough-sleeping harder or impossible.

In addition to legal, physical and financial obstacles for using space in a certain way, the location and design of a place influence the perception of what is possible and appropriate activity in such places. At the same time, these elements have an impact on the image of the users of the place and their behaviour as ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’, and on whether they become targets of aversion or deterrence, even if their activities would not be outright forbidden or illegal.

Crime prevention advice often assumes that residents in a neighbourhood regard their yards, lawns and parking lots outside the dwellings as belonging to them. Such places may also be designed in a way intended to make strangers avoid them, and the residents take better care of them. To make a place ‘defensible’ (Newman 1972) is also to make people define it as semi-private and belonging to a specific collective of residents, rather than to ‘everybody’.

Gentrification and the A-team

To illustrate the dynamics of competing definitions of public space and of its main users, I will give a short description of the fate of a few public benches in my neighbourhood. In 1999, I moved into a flat in a private rental building in what was considered to be a nice part of Göteborg: rather old but well-kept multi-dwelling houses, lots of restaurants at ground level, several small cinemas and the like. There are also some facilities for homeless people, such as a café and a shelter, and some institutions of control, like a police station and a place for sobering up, run by the local social authorities, in the neighbourhood. However, in the past decade almost all rental dwellings in the neighbourhood have been converted into owner-occupied
In these cases, the first tenant-owner will make a considerable profit, but it is not realised until the dwellings are sold anew. Hence, they soon change owners, which quickens gentrification.

In the short walk from home to the nearest tram stop, I pass seven restaurants, a tobacco shop, a non-profit cinema, a grocery shop, and a deli. I used to pass also two pairs of benches, partly concealed by rhododendron bushes in the broad pavement, and a little triangular square with five or six benches facing each other in the shadow of a couple of old trees. These benches were often occupied by people who sat and talked, drank beer or liquor or just took a rest. However, about a year ago the benches by the bushes were suddenly replaced by cycle stands. At about the same time, the triangular public place was fenced in, and its benches replaced by tables and chairs belonging to a café nearby. An old neighbour of mine has noted that there is no longer any place to sit down and rest for free on her way to and from the shop. She did not particularly like the middle-aged beer-drinking men who used to dominate the place under the trees, but she does not feel any more at home with the young fancy people nowadays having their cafe latte in the privatised, fenced-in place. And where did the beer-drinkers go? While some obviously have deserted the neighbourhood, others are found at the tram stop, where the only remaining public benches are found; but for how long? In 2007, several letters to the editor in the local newspaper complained about the ‘A-team’ at the tram stop.

In most town centres and many local squares in Sweden you find a corner or a place with a pretty stable group of middle-aged, substance-abusing men, commonly called the A-team (A being the initial of the Swedish words for both alcoholics – alkoholister – and unemployed – arbetslösa). Some of them are homeless, but most of them are not. In a study of local suburban squares in Göteborg, Olsson, Ohlander & Cruse Sondén (2004: 194) noticed that the tolerance for this kind of people varies with other factors, such as whether they tend to remain in a specific corner or part of a square, or spread all over it, and whether or not other people interact with them. Where such interaction goes on, a common attitude is that “since we know them, we are not afraid”. The authors identify three qualities of a place where the A-team gathers: the availability of benches, an open view over the square, and bushes that allow them to be partly shut off from people’s view. And they conclude:

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5 This development is possible through, first, a law that gives precedence for such societies of renters to buy a property that is for sale and, second, the tax legislation which makes it more profitable for private landlords to sell their real estates to the sitting tenants than to other companies. As a result, they are sold below the market price.
… in most cases it is better to let the A-team take a place at the square and that this place can be shaped according to the above-mentioned requirements. To try to drive them out, or minimise their presence through making places uncomfortable, may work for a while and will often result in bigger congregations somewhere else. In addition, and this is also a crucial point, what makes the squares nice for the A-team is also what makes other people like it there. Seats in various locations so that you can watch the life in the square and get in touch with other people are something many people appreciate and that has a great impact on the atmosphere in the square. To impoverish the square is not a good way to develop it (Olsson, Ohlander & Cruse Sondén 2004: 199; author translation).

A new way to deal with men who have a drinking problem and/or have no place to live has been tried in Denmark. Special premises like pubs and day centres are being established for ‘marginal men’, beside similar places for ‘ordinary’ people. Elm Larsen (2002) describes these places as “marginal rooms for marginal people”, an expression that recalls the Danish solution to homelessness, namely to build “weird houses for weird people”. Strangely, these marginal rooms make up a specific kind of public space, to which other people have access formally, but where they would not go in reality. The consequence is that “regular public space” is deprived of some of its elements, while marginal people are micro-segregated from others, although not in different parts of the city (Elm Larsen 2002).

Hence, we can identify three different strategies to exclude homeless people and other unwanted categories of people from public spaces through design. Seats that can be used free of charge can be completely removed; the place can be rendered ‘limited public’ by letting it to private business, which requires consumption in return for using chairs; and the whole setting can be re-styled in a way that deters people whose age, clothes and class do not fit with the imagined customer.

**Defining Decorum in Commons**

Concerns about real estate prices and about the status of the neighbourhood are the main causes of home-owners and settled residents trying to control public space close to their own ground and turn it into defensible space (Newman 1972). Another important reason for their involvement is, of course, that more distant places cannot substitute for what I propose to call their ‘commons’. The commons of the traditional village were pieces of land to which local inhabitants had equal access, but there were nevertheless moral restrictions in terms of how they should be used, when, and who were eligible (Gallardo 1998). The concept *commons* is therefore well suited for places that are open for the public but where those living close to it claim, if not exclusive access, at least authority to define what norms should prevail in it. Accordingly, they also determine what behaviour should be regarded as violating the decorum at this very place, or as ‘situational improprieties’
When the municipality makes plans for developing or changing such places, NIMBY reactions frequently express or imply these locally specific place norms and the fear that they would be breached and undermined if new kinds of people started to visit or move into the neighbourhood.

Those who lack private homes and also are excluded from most other places in the city, such as homeless people, may be equally emotionally involved in what they consider to be their last or only resort. However, when they gather and find shelter in a specific place, other users may experience this as an attempt to appropriate it and as an invasion of ‘their’ commons and even as a threat against their safety. Subsequent struggles sometimes result in physical exclusion of homeless people.

In Göteborg and certainly in other towns and cities, there are a great number of places regarded as commons by residents living nearby, but treated as public places – or as their own commons – by other groups, e.g., homeless people. One way of understanding the conflicts that might occur in these sites is to regard them as accounts of rivaling definitions and perceptions of the place-specific *decorum*, i.e., minimal rules of decent conduct (Goffman 1963/1966), and to what extent different kinds of users comply with it.

An instance of such a conflict was related in *Faktum*, the Göteborg street paper (Adolfsson 2004a). In a park in a suburb of Göteborg, young families with children like to sit in the grass in one part, while homeless people, some of whom drink and smoke, use another part. However, the latter group is often expelled by the police on behalf of the families, who claim that the homeless users of the park scare them through noise and talking loudly. One of the homeless interviewees maintained his right to be in the park, firstly because he used to live near it, and secondly because he had nowhere else to go. Old people in a third part of the park, on the other hand, seemed more tolerant and less afraid and accepted both categories of fellow users of this public space (Adolfsson 2004a). Similar conflicts are being articulated concerning public squares in the city (see Olsson, Ohlander & Cruse Sondén 2004).

In the language of Goffman (1963/1966: 20), “the same physical space may be caught within the domain of two different social occasions. The social situation then may be the scene of potential or actual conflicts between the sets of regulations that ought to govern.” The intensity of the conflict is likely to grow with the distance between the parties’ norms and cultural traditions and decrease with their access to alternative space.

By way of summing up: in public places, to which different kinds of people have equal access, there may still be serious conflicts of interests concerning symbolic ownership, including place use and definitions of local decorum. If one party has
more access to the political agenda than the others, or manages to build alliances with influential agencies or actors, this may result in exclusion of homeless people through re-design or change of rules or rule enforcement.

**Displaced Definitions through Neo-corporatism**

After a short introduction on the kind of public-private partnership that currently determines the direction of much urban renewal, I am going to present a few examples of ongoing redefinitions of relevance for homeless people: these concern begging, the status of space as public, and crime prevention.

**New Actors, New Corporatism**

Despite the fact that it is not possible for the municipalities to forbid or punish begging, city authorities may try to counteract it in other ways, such as through joining public-private networks and associations that work for this aim. Many of these partnerships explicitly target the appearance of the downtown area or the city core, with the sometimes less outspoken aim to attract certain kinds of people and deter others.

The Association of Swedish City Cores (Föreningen Svenska Stadskärnor), which also runs a limited company with the same name, works for renewal of city centres in a way that fosters ‘commerce, safety and niceness’. Members of the board represent property owners, companies and authorities (www.svenskastadskarnor.se). Other examples are Stockholm City in Cooperation (City i Samverkan, www.cityisamverkan.org), which in 1998 ran a project against begging in Stockholm City and managed to involve the local social authority’s unit for homeless men in this work, and Malmö City Cooperation (Malmö Citysamverkan AB, www.malmocity.se), presented below. Typically, these neo-corporative organisations (Crawford 1997) nowadays provide very little information and hardly any controversial news for non-members on their websites. But with their focus on profit and commerce, there are many reasons to suspect that they are not fond of homeless people in city centres, and that the goal to promote ‘safety’ implies exclusion of people who are blamed for causing insecurity, if not crime. Moreover, such associations provide direct access to policy-makers for business members (Crawford 1997: 213 ff.), whose interests may be at odds with those of homeless people.

Malmö City Cooperation can serve as an illustration. It is a limited company consisting of the following members: Malmö City, primarily represented by the Technical Board’s politicians and officials from the Street and City Building Office; property owners (private individuals as well as companies) within the area of activity and the ‘City Association’, whose members run shops or represent other trade or industry within
the area; in addition there are stakeholders “like sponsors that contribute financially without having a vote and companies, associations and authorities sharing the same interests and without financial ties” (www.malmocity.se).

According to the association’s website, its idea is to work together to counteract “vandalism, violence, littering, begging and graffiti”, in order to: “1) create an attractive city core, 2) extend our share of the market, and 3) increase the cooperation between the parties.” The first goal includes extended parking space in the city centre and reduced shoplifting and graffiti, while the second goal is to increase the number of customers and visitors.

In this kind of private-public partnership, politicians and officials in the local authorities agree to work for (and financially contribute to) specific commercial interests in the city. Thereby, important employers and property owners are being informally co-opted (Selznick 1949) in the city’s planning process and gain an influence over municipal rules, norms, decisions and priorities that many residents would find at odds with the principles of democracy. What goes on and is decided in the associations’ boardrooms, unlike debates and decisions in the municipal parliaments, is hidden from public control and escapes political scrutiny.

Redefining Begging

Begging used to be a legal way to support oneself but was subjected to increased regulation in the 19th century. In Sweden, it was in principle forbidden in 1847 and punished as vagrancy. Special supervisors saw too that beggars were prosecuted (or taken care of, if they were entitled to poor relief). Today, begging per se is no crime, but aggressive panhandling can theoretically still be a crime if it is classified as disorderly conduct or molestation (see above).

The presence of beggars in the subway or in other public transport, primarily in Stockholm, has been a recurrent topic in the debate for the past decade. In 1998 the public-private partnership City in Cooperation, involving business companies, the police and the local social authorities, announced its ‘Begging Project’ aimed at “making commerce more nice and cosy for our customers” through “getting rid of the beggars in the streets” (Dagens Nyheter 4.12.1998 and 6.12.1998). As the public reaction to the project was quite critical⁶, the businessmen soon withdrew from public involvement, while the social authority continued. For instance, it printed and distrib-

⁶ According to the Stockholm newspapers, the general public was rather angry about the campaign since it perceived beggars as a sign of deficiencies of the welfare state, rather than of the moral character of those who beg (cf. Fooks & Pantazis 1999 on a similar tendency to conceive of homeless people as victims in London).
uted a booklet which urged people not to give alms to beggars, since they would not spend this money on shelter but only on liquor and drugs: “instead of helping, a gift will risk aggravating substance abuse” (Stockholm City 2000).

The subway of Stockholm is run by the private company Connex (now Veolia), which has attempted a zero tolerance approach similar to the one introduced by William Bratton in the New York subway before this approach was universalised to all local policing in that city (Kelling & Coles 1996). Special measures have been taken in order to reduce free riding in the Stockholm subway, and contacts were also made with the subway police to reduce begging. Connex as well as SL (Stockholms Lokaltrafik), the municipal company which is responsible for the subway stations, reported beggars to the police, who in turn tried to persuade the district attorneys to prosecute the beggars (Connex 2004). However, as begging is no crime according to the Swedish law, prosecution requires that it is judged to be disorderly conduct (see above), something the attorneys have not been willing to claim so far. One of them even wrote an angry debate article on this issue:

There are many kinds of behaviour in society that are disapproved of, and many of these are not fit for handling by the criminal justice system. Begging belongs to them. First, it is ethically dubious to intervene with criminal law against something that has no punishment value and at the same time is a consequence of a social problem… Secondly, it is a hopeless task with the current legislation to try to get a beggar convicted for disorderly conduct. So far I have not seen any beggar who has lived up to the current requirement on what should be regarded as offensive… If, on the other hand, somebody were too pushy, it would be a different thing. Then one could imagine that the beggar would be guilty of molestation… Thirdly, the planned method is so impractical that it would have no consequences. If the behaviour were criminalised, fines would be the only possible punishment. It is in the nature of things that the persons who could be involved have hardly any capacity to pay. Furthermore, it should be necessary to reach them by mail, which would not be easy, as many of them probably have no fixed abode (Hillegren 2004: 9; author translation).

The public transport companies in Stockholm will not give up, though. Besides the fact that SL might start reporting beggars for molestation, it is considering a re-formulation of the terms of travelling:

If a person has a valid ticket he/she is entitled to travel with us, not to collect money or play an instrument. If we manage to include this in our travelling terms we would have the right to eject the beggars, says (…), associate security director in SL (Dagens Nyheter 2.8.2006).
The company has also asked its own lawyers to find other ways to solve the begging problem in buses and trains. Since the Public Order Act has not been useful for them, they consider claiming that public transportations constitute private space. In that case, the company believes, it is up to itself as the owner to state local rules of order, including whether or not begging shall be allowed (Dagens Nyheter 2.8.2006). However, as we have seen above, this would require municipal and court decisions that such an interpretation is valid.

Redefining Public Space: The Nordstan Case

In the centre of Göteborg there is a huge indoor shopping centre, Nordstan (also called Femman), consisting of eight city blocks, whose buildings were completely demolished and replaced in the late 1960s. The streets follow the old city plan, carry the old names and continue outside the centre, but they are now covered by glass roofs. Although the land is fully privately owned, the fact that it includes original streets and squares entailed that these parts of the centre used to be defined as public space, and the police were responsible for keeping order. Nordstan’s position in the centre of the city, attached to the central bus and railway station through a short tunnel, gives reason for a great number of people to walk through it every day, whether they want to shop or not. Accordingly, Nordstan used to be viewed as not only a commercial centre but also a public place where people gathered: youths, substance abusers or homeless people.

In the beginning and the middle of the 1990s, social workers and politicians expressed worries that teenagers gathering in Nordstan risked becoming criminals and drug addicts. A motion was submitted to the City Parliament on the need for coordinated activities by the police, other authorities, businessmen, and property owners in order to improve the public order in Nordstan. Locking the whole centre at night was mentioned as a possible solution but rejected by the City Council (Göteborg City 1996), but the Council did agree that the city should cooperate with business and property owners for improved order. Since then, the suggestion to close the centre has been primarily voiced by business organisations and the police and targeting rough sleepers.

In the mid-1990s, property owners and tenants (that is, shops and restaurants with business in Nordstan) formed an ‘Order Group’, which aimed at improving the reputation and profit of the shopping centre. It arranged a series of meetings with

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7 According to the organisation of property owners and shop tenants in the area, Nordstan is the largest indoor shopping centre in Northern Europe, with an area of 320,000 square metres. It was established in 1972 but has expanded since (www.Nordstan.se). Nowadays it includes 170 shops and restaurants, 150 offices and 2,700 parking places. 5,000 employees work in the nine large buildings, which occupy eight blocks. An estimated number of 29 million people visit Nordstan every year (www.angelfire.com/my/spartrafik/galleria.html).
the police, other public authorities and charity organisations (Göteborg City 1998). In one of these meetings, the group demanded information on ‘who is responsible for rough-sleepers’ spending the night in the centre’. The Order Group requested that the image of Nordstan being mediated to the public be more positive, and suggested that the police should enforce prohibitions against drinking (except in the local restaurants) and prioritise Nordstan in their resource allocation. Furthermore, the group declared its intention to employ security guards and contracted a lawyer in order to examine the legal possibilities to close the centre at night and increase the video surveillance (Göteborg City 1998).

On 4 October 2004, the centre was indeed locked – and since then it has been swept of people each night. Nowadays it is closed and empty between 0200 and 0530. The decision was taken by the owners alone, who were eventually empowered by the municipality to do so (Göteborgs-Posten 27.5.2003). The formal reason was to “facilitate cleaning⁸, make building work more rational and make it easier to organise exhibitions”, and to “save costs for the guards” (Göteborgs-Posten 26.5.2004). Getting rid of homeless people was not an explicit argument at this time.

However, already before the implementation of the decision it had become gradually harder, and finally more or less impossible, for homeless people to remain in the indoor centre at night (Göteborgs-Posten 1.2.2004). In an interview study of rough-sleepers in Göteborg during 1999–2000, many of them complained that neither the police nor the security guards accepted their lying down on the floor/ground in Nordstan, despite the fact that it was public space and that sleeping rough is no crime (Sahlin 2000).

(In Nordstan) you cannot sit down for more than 40–50 minutes before the guards come by on their round. If you’re lucky, they say nothing but only pass by. Or else you have to stand up and start walking and keep walking until they have left, then you can sit down again for a while. And you have to keep on like that (interview with rough-sleeper).

Another interviewee said that he tried to keep walking in Nordstan all night, “but of course you feel much degraded. People look at you and you realise what they think.” Most of the interviewed rough-sleepers described the police and security guards as the worst threat they experienced in Nordstan, but they were also afraid of theft, as they did not experience the guards as protecting them (cf. Baxter & Hopper 1981, Ballentyne 1999).

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⁸ However, the company responsible for cleaning Nordstan told in another newspaper report, published in February 2003, that their 25 cleaning workers do not clean the centre while it is locked. (webnews.textalk.com/se/article_print.phtml?id=29823).
According to an article in the street paper *Faktum*, unknowingly echoing the Order Group in 1998, nobody wanted to recognise that the rough-sleepers really existed – or if they did, it was somebody else’s responsibility. Although the homeless people in Nordstan did not want to make trouble but obeyed the order to leave when the centre was locked, they expressed frustration on the way the centre was privatised, since they defined the streets and squares as public space. “These streets belong to the people of Göteborg, so they are also ours.” They feared that some of them would freeze to death because of the decision to close Nordstan at night (Adolfsson 2004b).

**Redefining Crime Prevention**

In December 2000 the local radio station reported that Nordstan was going to be the first place in Göteborg where the police had been replaced by private security guards, “since the shopkeepers are fed up with trouble and thefts.” These guards (*ordningsvakter*) have extended capacity to intervene and they have the same right as the police to expel people from the area. The market director of the indoor centre claimed in the radio interview that surveys proved that visitors were getting an ever more positive attitude to Nordstan because of the improved order (*Västekot/P4 Göteborg 12/19/2000*).

In the context of a series of seminars on conflicts of space use in Göteborg University 2004/2005, several researchers made observations of Nordstan at different times of the day and the night. Besides the fact that the centre is now completely emptied of benches or other places to sit down for free, there is absolutely no place to hide when the shops are closed, no partitioned place – nowhere to shut off the CCTV camera gaze. A sociologist who made a study of Nordstan in 1986/87 reflected in his paper on how the surveillance and control of the centre had changed. Up to 2000 there was a police station in Nordstan. The police are much more seldom there nowadays; there are fewer field workers from the local social authority. Instead there is a system of surveillance that covers all public spaces through video cameras, which are running all the time. They are not visible for the visitors – but somewhere there should be signs informing that the place is subjected to CCTV. Guards sitting in a separate room survey the cameras and intervene when something unwanted occurs. This means that responsibility for surveillance has shifted from representatives for the society (the state) to the guardians of the private society (the business interest). In addition, there is an apparent transfer from the police in the environment to the more anonymous surveillance through cameras (Olsson 2004; author translation).
As an element in the privatisation of public control, private security companies have partly replaced, partly been integrated with the police. ‘SafeSite’ (www.safesite.se) is a tool which coordinates information from the police and security guards in order to warn customers (which can be shops, hotels or other work-places) that a suspected shoplifter or thief or somebody with an unwanted appearance – “in short, everything that might affect your business” (www.safesite.se) – is hanging out in the neighbourhood or approaching the premises. The system is run in cooperation between two of the biggest security companies (Securitas and Falck Security), the police and the business network City in Cooperation in Stockholm (see above).

The consequences of this exchange of information, new technology, and private security substituting for public police are not quite known but may be worrying. Through participant observation of what goes on in the control rooms for CCTV cameras in Oslo, Lomell (2007) made a comparison between police surveillance of a public outdoor space, on the one hand, and security guards’ supervision over privately owned shopping malls on the other hand. She found that the police surveillance was primarily oriented towards keeping an eye on what was going on and where different kinds of people, like drug addicts and youngsters, were to be found – the aim being to see to that they did not mix too much. In the shopping malls, however, the function of the camera control was primarily to identify and expel people who were defined as unwanted in the territory, above all people who looked as if they were homeless or drug addicts – and regardless of their behaviour and their intention to shop (see also, e.g., Amster 2003). The private security system, in other words, practised border control, while the public police used discipline (Mork Lomell 2006, Hier 2004).

Returning once again to Göteborg and Nordstan: in spring 2004, the local crime prevention council for the central district claimed that it had decided to prioritise prevention of false identification, illegal taxi driving and shoplifting in Nordstan (press message 20.4.2004). The city’s acceptance of the closure of a substantial urban area at night for the public, combined with its ambition to prioritise crime that might reduce the profit of Nordstan’s companies (but which is not likely to cause unsafety or otherwise harm the general public), seem to underline a shift in the constituency of the local crime prevention council, as well as to undermine democracy in the city. Although the New York model of policing was never officially or generally applied by the police force in Sweden (Lindström 2006), this is one of many indications that the general idea of “broken windows” (Kelling & Coles 1996) has indeed influenced local crime prevention in the country.
Whose City?

In the article cited in the introduction (Sahlin 2004), I argued that private for-profit companies may be at the same time anxious to exclude homeless people from their territory and willing to fund and organise shelter for them – as long as it helps to keep homeless people away from their territory. In other words, the enclosure of homeless people in shelters or specific ‘marginal rooms’ such as cafés for homeless people etc. is promoted not only as a way to include them in society, but also as a measure to exclude them from places where those in power do not want them to be.

The development since has been somewhat more negative than I suspected. For instance, the central blocks of Göteborg are indeed emptied and closed by night, despite the fact that this idea was repeatedly rejected in the 1990s with reference to streets and squares being public space. In the city parliament debates in 1996–1998, many members, associations, and authorities wanted more activities for youth and more public events with free access in Nordstan. It seems that the development has gone in the opposite direction – also in contrast to the tendency of isolated American shopping malls pretending to be ‘community centres’ (Staeheli & Mitchell 2006). Except for shopping, there is not very much left to do in the central blocks of Göteborg city today. “Of course we don’t want people to fare badly,” said the Market Director of Nordstan regarding the decision to close it by night, “but now it is made clear for whom Nordstan exists” (Göteborgs-Posten 1.11.2004. Emphasis added.)

Cooperation between for-profit companies, property owners and authorities in determining the goals of city renewal, including the definitions of rights, rules, purpose and legitimate use of different places and spaces in the city, tends to favour the interests of business more than those of citizens in general, and far more than the needs of the disadvantaged, to whom the homeless belong. While businessmen and their partnerships have become more cautious not to annoy the general public with brutal wordings since the anti-beggars campaign in Stockholm city in 1998, they stick to their agenda although it is more hidden and discrete.

On the other hand, many residents and visitors of city centres may rather support the urban development with the current limitations of public space and the subtle border control that keep homeless people out of their environment – and even if they do not, their wants, visions and norms probably differ from those of the homeless. Nowadays, gates and staircases are locked in order to keep possible criminals and rough-sleepers out of multi-dwelling houses and their yards, while benches and seats are removed from pavements and squares – a situation that increases the pressure on remaining indoor public places in the city. In parks and open places not quite in the city core, settled residents sometimes try to exclude
homeless people with the help of the police. Mobile out-reach teams have been formed in the big cities to help rough-sleepers find places to spend the night other than in the commercial centres. All in all, homeless people are being squeezed out of public space and into shelters, which in turn are being pushed out from the city centre. However, this paper has not dealt with the other dilemma facing the roofless, namely that access to shelters and homeless tends to depend on the homeless persons' compliance with work-plans, sobriety requirements and similar preconditions, and that the shelters themselves may be very unsafe places to dwell in (see, e.g., Ballentyne 1999, Sahlin 2000) and therefore might not solve the problem, neither for the homeless, nor for those who want to exclude them from public places and commons.

Although property owners and business companies are the major actors in the shopping malls and commercial centres of the cities, they cannot actually close or fence off or otherwise restrict homeless people's access to their quarters unless local authorities empower them to do so. The real danger is embedded in the new public-private partnerships, formed in order to renew and improve the city and make it more attractive for affluent customers and visitors. This neo-corporatism might lead to – and speed up – a gradual displacement of the definitions of places, behaviour and legitimate control: public space becomes private, private security guards replace public police, legal behaviour becomes improper, begging is redefined as molestation, and local crime prevention councils turn into informal guardians of the new private order and private partners’ profit.
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Homelessness ‘in transition’: a Slovenian Study

Srna Mandič and Maša Filipovič Hrast†

Introduction

During the last decade, homelessness was among the important issues that appeared in the EU policy and the research agendas (see, for instance, Boelhouwer, 1993; Avramov, 1995 and 1999; Duffy, 1998; Edgar, Doherty and Mina-Coull, 1999; Edgar, Doherty and Meert, 2002). Homelessness was also related to other wider issues such as human dignity and social cohesion (Duffy, 1998), to social exclusion and empowerment (Edgar, Doherty and Mina-Coull, 2000) and housing paths (Clapham, 1999). Homelessness and housing vulnerability became recognised by policy makers and became a public policy issue in the EU (see for instance European public policy concerning access to housing, BIPE, 2000; Edgar, Doherty and Meert, 2002). The major break-through of homelessness – into EU policy – occurred within the strategy for eradication of social exclusion, initiated by the Lisbon Summit, and further developed into the EU Strategy against poverty and social exclusion. Among the aims of the programme is to achieve ‘[a]ccess for all to decent sanitary housing as well as basic services’. Observers expect an even greater concern for housing issues in future EU policy (Kleinman, 2002). In dealing with homelessness and housing vulnerability, governments in EU countries have developed new policy solutions which recognise the significant role of NGOs and their networks not only in providing a variety of services but also in assessment and articulation of new needs (Edgar, Doherty and Mina-Coull, 1999).

Concern about the access to adequate housing is also a part of other international policy documents. These, however, are not binding and imply a lesser degree of government commitment. For instance, the United Nation Istanbul Declaration on

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Human Settlements (1996) implies that governments affirm ‘commitment to the full and progressive realisation of the right to adequate housing as provided for in international instruments’ (p.7). There is also the European Social Charter (revised in 1996), Article 31: “With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to implement measures designed to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources”.

However, in countries ‘in transition’ homelessness was generally not debated as an issue among policy analysts, even though there is an extensive literature on housing reforms. In this chapter on homelessness Slovenia, as part of Central and East European (CEE) countries, is examined as subject to ‘transitional housing reforms’. For CEE countries that recently became new member states in the EU, the catalogue of problems that they bring with them into the enlarged EU to be dealt with in the future is their ‘transitional heritage’. The homelessness problem in Slovenia is described and two issues are discussed in more detail. Firstly, housing reforms are assessed in terms of their impact on structural causes of homelessness. Secondly, the earliest policy responses towards homelessness are analysed; here, the focus is on how the issue of homelessness became recognised and included into the policy agenda. The thesis of the article is that, in the early period, transition has led to increasing housing vulnerability and strengthened the structural causes of homelessness, while at the same time this vulnerability was not recognised in the policy context; this lack of recognition changed gradually only in the second decade of transition.

This chapter also reflects the interest of Henk Meert in housing and homeless issues in the new member states and other non-EU countries. He for example, visited Albania during the ENHR conference in 2003 and gave an inspired talk to the European Observatory on Homelessness on his impressions of the housing situation there.

**Reasons for homelessness: structural and individual factors**

Homelessness is a social phenomenon that is linked to multiple exclusions (i.e. exclusion from various spheres – housing sphere, social sphere, labour market). It affects various people in different life situations, which means that homeless people should not be observed as a single group. The reasons for homelessness are manifold. Several authors (for example Edgar et al. 2002) distinguish between structural, institutional, relationship and personal factors that may cause homeless-
ness and Avramov (1995) established the structural (social) and proximate (individual) determinants of homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU. Frequently these reasons combine, leading to the end result.

Among the individual factors that can lead to extreme housing exclusion, Avramov (1995, p. 136) mentions, as the most precarious combination: the lack of income and lack of qualifications in combination with traumatic events and personal characteristics. Edgar et al. (2002, p. 82) identify as the most vulnerable groups susceptible to homelessness: poor, unemployed or those with low paid employment and few of the skills demanded in an increasingly flexible market.

The structural reasons for homelessness, the focus of our article, are found to comprise a number of factors. Three structural determinants of homelessness were emphasised by Avramov (1995): 1) social-demographic processes, particularly the increase in the number of households and the corresponding decrease in the average household size; 2) housing supply which was not able to meet these new needs and reflecting the policy shift towards ‘decreasing social housing, deregulating the market and reducing the cheap housing supply’; 3) poverty, particularly the growing gap between the rich and the poor, and other forms of social exclusion.

Many authors have emphasised structural reasons as most important in producing homelessness, among which the housing variables are to the fore. Ji (2006) cited structural factors as the strongest risk factors in becoming homeless and this has been confirmed in other research which has identified the availability of low-cost housing (Elliot and Krivo 1991), rents (Bohanon 1991) and tightness of the rental housing market (Burt 1992, Tucker 1990).

Edgar, Doherty and Meert (2002) in their report examine homelessness as an outcome of two dimensions of the social context, linked to the housing market. Firstly, ‘of the way in which the European housing market – both in its private and state spheres – embraces some households and rejects others, producing and reproducing conditions of housing vulnerability for significant sections of Europe’s population’; and ‘of the way in which civil society is imbricated in the market /state nexus and the role it plays in providing the locus of coping strategies for those unable to access housing through state or market channels’ (Edgar, Doherty and Meert, 2002, p.1). Secondly, they identified a dynamic relation between these two dimensions in terms of ‘pathways into and routes out of homelessness within… the individual life course’. They also stress governments’ changing engagement in housing: a decrease in the direct provision of housing and an increase in the activities that facilitate and enable other providers of housing, such as local organisations, NGOs and the private sector, as well as the personal social networks.
Homelessness in Slovenia

In this part of the article we present the trends in homelessness in Slovenia. In Slovenia, until recently, practically no research on homelessness was made that would provide an exact account of their number or their profile. However, some researchers have indicated that the number of homeless people has increased and that their socio-economic characteristics have changed (Černič Mali 2000). Without comprehensive data we are left to rely on ‘assessments’ given by the professionals. The increase in estimated numbers of homeless people was from approximately 400 in 1996, to 800 in 2005 (see Filipovic 2005). There is also an 11% per year increase in the numbers availing of free meals at the Ljubljana shelter reflecting an increase in the number of homeless people (Dekleva and Razpotnik 2007, p. 109). Research undertaken in Ljubljana estimated the number of homeless people to be around 300 (Dekleva and Razpotnik 2007). This in absolute numbers is not a high number in comparison to other CEE countries. For example, in Hungary for Budapest alone 10,000 homeless are reported and for Czech Republic in Prague, almost 2,000 (Edgar and Meert 2005). However, the trends indicated in Slovenia are not positive and show an increasing level of housing vulnerability.

The new groups of homeless people, whose numbers are increasing in Slovenia are young drug misusers, women with children and middle aged single persons. Among the reasons for homelessness is, increasingly, the inability to pay the rent (Černič Mali 2000). In addition, the older age groups are becoming more vulnerable and visible. This corresponds to some of the trends in Europe. Avramov (1995, 165) has stressed, a decade ago, that homelessness was increasingly experienced by young people and young families. However, there was (and still is) a predominant public perception of a homeless person as usually an adult male with an alcohol (or drug) abuse problem (Trbanc et al. 2003). Social work practitioners indicate that alcohol abuse problems, mental problems, domestic violence and excessive housing expenses are strongly linked with the occurrence of homelessness. Similarly, Cvetič (2004) cites as the most typical causes of homelessness in Slovenia: eviction, unemployment, family reasons (divorce, violence in the family) personal problems (mental distress, alcoholism, and addiction), inability to reintegrate (prisoners), and functional illiteracy (i.e. creating victims of fraud). The reasons therefore are similar to those described by Edgar et al (2002) and Avramov (1995).

The data above indicate that housing vulnerability, in the period after the transition, has increased and has been almost constantly increasing until the present time. We argue that structural changes have had the major influence on this increasing vulnerability and we turn to this point in the following section.
Strengthening structural causes for homelessness in Slovenia

CEE countries started their structural housing reforms during the period of ‘transition’, which involved complex development of new arrangements of the market economy and of political democracy. These housing reforms have been already widely discussed (see Turner, Hegedus and Tosics, 1992; Clapham, Hegedus, Kintrea and Tosics, 1996; Struyk, 1996; Hegedus, Mayo and Tosics, 1996; Priemus and Mandic, 2000; Lowe and Tsenkova, 2004). In Slovenia these reforms have encompassed denationalisation of dwellings and a privatisation of a significant share of the housing stock (see Mandič 1994, 2000). Have these reforms created better conditions to alleviate housing shortages and homelessness? The analysis will focus on two elements in the structural framework of homelessness. First is the reduced availability of housing resources and its consequence for inter-generational distribution of housing. The second element relates to changing demographic trends and the emergence of new social risks.

Reduced availability of housing resources and their inter-generational redistribution

In the late 1980s, prior to transition, considerable housing shortages and overcrowding were encountered in CEE (Tosics, 1987). Multiple occupancy and long waiting lists for rentals were common and, according to Szelenyi (1983), permanent shortages of rented accommodation were a constant feature of ‘housing under state socialism’. During the period of transition and of comprehensive housing reforms, the general availability of housing did not improve; quite the opposite. Investments in housing and housing production sharply decreased, as well as the general affordability of housing (Hegedus, Mayo and Tosics, 1996; Struyk, 1996). According to Struyk (1996), this was a consequence of the role that housing played in the wider economic changes of the time: namely, as a ‘shock-absorber’, absorbing the massive cuts in national governments’ budgets.

It was the public rented stock that suffered the major reduction. As a result of privatisation, based on tenants’ ‘right-to-buy’, the share of public housing in the total housing stock has rapidly decreased. The average proportion of public housing in 12 CEE countries decreased from 27 percent in 1991, to 19 percent in 1994 (Hegedus, Mayo and Tosics, 1996, p.15). In one group of countries, consisting of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, the decrease was mild. In the remaining group, the decrease was dramatic and the remaining public rented stock came to comprise less than 10 percent of total housing; Slovenia experienced one of the largest declines from 33 percent to 9 percent (for further details see Priemus and Mandic, 2000)
Privatisation has certainly improved housing opportunities of those households which managed to buy their homes at very favourable prices, and led – at least in Slovenia- to a high mobility rate (Mandic, 2001). Yet at the same time and for the same reason, housing opportunities of other groups (particularly those vulnerable households waiting to be housed) have worsened because of the lack of rented accommodation.

The negative impact of privatisation on general housing availability can be seen particularly in a long-term perspective. In particular this relates to the inter-generational redistribution of housing resources; such redistribution presents some cohorts with a historically unique opportunity to collect the accumulated public resources, as in the case of tenants’ ‘right-to-buy’, and leaves the following cohorts with fewer opportunities especially for renting. Such long-term effects were first pointed out by demographers in other countries that had previously introduced a right to buy programme. Kendig (1990: 152) thus argued that ‘when Australia and Britain cut back on their investment in public housing, they disadvantage low-income households for decades to come, in order to benefit current taxpayers’.

In Slovenia, privatisation had fairly strong popular support and the conversion debate was actually a ‘conversion campaign’, while expectations were quite ambiguous (for a detailed account, see Mandic, 1994). At the same time there was the expectation – as had been often argued prior to 1991- that privatisation of the social rented housing was needed to free-up the capital that was invested there. Indeed, privatisation did manage to ‘free’ this ‘tied’ capital and generate capital flows, however, it was not for the benefit of the housing sector and its development. The housing sector turned out to be the loser, and was subject to a massive outflow of capital, with very few arrangements to re-channel it back to the housing sphere. The bulk of the purchase money was generated as early as 1992, while the new housing policy was not implemented until five years later, thus the opportunity to direct the capital flows into housing was lost, and the consequence was a lack of financial resources to fuel the new housing policy during the transitional decade. The delay in the implementation of new arrangements and particularly of safety-net provisions resulted in the most vulnerable groups being victimised.

Later developments (after the first wave of transition) also limit the possibilities of exiting homelessness and increased housing vulnerability. Chances of receiving non-profit rental housing are minimal due to its general low availability. Even though it was envisaged that this sector would gradually develop, this has not happened. This failure is partly linked to institutional and funding issues (see Cirman 2007). For example, in Ljubljana municipality the yearly rate of approved applicants for social housing varied from 6.8% in 1995 to 9.7% in 2005 (Hegler 2006). These figures indicate the very low share of eligible applicants that are able to improve their
housing conditions via this sector. In addition, priority is given to families with children, pushing single roofless households further down the priority lists².

In conclusion, the availability of housing, particularly of non-profit rented accommodation, has been detrimentally affected by transition, and vulnerable groups in housing have been among the 'losers' during the transition. The transitional decade has added to the structural problems and to causes of homelessness and housing vulnerability. Also, while new forms of housing opened up as a consequence of the legalisation of the private renting, this sector remains to a great extent un-regulated with little tenant protection, thus creating new forms of housing vulnerability.

New social risks and demographic trends

The end of socialism has brought new economic freedoms as well as new risks. Stable employment and wages and a variety of welfare services are no longer guaranteed. People are exposed to new economic risks, including unemployment. This affects the ability of households to enter and sustain home-ownership. Servicing loan repayments and the costs of maintenance and modernisation for home-owners is an obligation difficult to meet for low-income households and even more so for those experiencing unemployment or other social vulnerabilities. The lack of access to moderate rental accommodation severely adds to the risk that ‘un-successful’ homeowners might become homeless.

There are also demographic trends that are occurring and that further accentuate the problem of decreasing rental accommodation. Housing demography clearly demonstrates how households at different life-cycle stages tend to have different housing needs and tenures. Even in the US, where ownership predominates, a high incidence of rental tenure is reported among younger households, single households and single parent households, while the major base of home-ownership is the classical family household, consisting of husband, wife and children (Sweet, 1990). Further growth of these non-family households may be expected, since it is reported as a general demographic trend, connected to the decreasing size of households and increase in their number. Thus, an over-reduced rental housing stock which is characteristic for the CEE countries may seriously affect the housing chances of a growing number of non-family households. Additionally, it may also restrict the incidence of demographic events such as new household formation. Even though the demographic trends (falling birth rates, etc.) for the majority of EU countries show low or negative population growth and also envisage such negative population growth in decades to come, the number of households has been increasing in the majority of EU countries (see e.g. Housing Statistics, 2004). This

² Trying to correct this municipality does sometimes offers dwellings specially for single people giving them priority.
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The previous section examined the changes in housing and has shown that new structural sources of housing vulnerability and homelessness were created during the transitional period, particularly the diminished rental sector. Now we observe how the political sphere responded to the problems thus created. Were the problems of housing vulnerability and homelessness recognised, did they enter the policy arena and how were they articulated? These issues are examined from a ‘social problem’ perspective, as developed in public policy analysis. Thus, according to Parsons (1995) when ‘a social problem’ is examined in the ‘policy cycle’ framework, the central question is how a problem is – or is not – processed through different stages of the policy process: from problem recognition and definition to agenda setting, formulation of a policy to intervene and its implementation. Parsons argues that “How this process happens proves crucial for the way in which policy is addressed” (Parsons, 1995, pp.87-88).

In the following sections we first identify the perceptions of housing and homelessness in Slovenia: how has this issue been positioned in relation to the policy agenda during the period of transition? Secondly, we examine the policy response and policy measures. Finally, we present an overview of the way in which the problem of housing vulnerability and homelessness has been regarded and identify some recent changes.

**Shelter issues superseded by property allocation issues**

The change that happened during the transition may be observed in terms of different functions of housing, particularly considering the distinction between the shelter and investment function of housing (Smith, 1971). It can be argued that what occurred early during transition was a shift in the emphasis from the provision of shelter to the investment function of housing. Under socialism, housing was perceived mostly as a resource for satisfaction of housing needs: housing was a residential facility to which everyone was entitled and would eventually get housed. However during the transition, this understanding of housing was to a large degree superseded by the notion of housing as an asset which qualifies its owner for economic rewards and constitutes his/her wealth.
At the macro social level, this shift was manifested in public policy formulation and agenda setting. Namely, two policies dominated the policy arena and debates in the sphere of housing: privatisation of rented housing and in some countries (Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, but not in Hungary) the restitution (returning assets to the pre-war original private owners or their heirs). These property-centred public policies treated housing predominantly as property and engineered a massive re-allocation of wealth. They were formulated mainly to solve wealth allocation issues (‘who gets what property under what conditions’), while housing policy and the welfare outcomes were sacrificed to a significant degree. Shelter issues long remained un-recognised, and policies to tackle affordability problems or homelessness were delayed for years.

The shift from housing as ‘shelter’ to housing as ‘property’ can still be observed (e.g. in new Housing Act adopted in 2003 and related housing documents). These indicate that the policy discourse has not changed even in the end of the observed transition period. The new Housing Act (2003) is very technical in character. A large part of the act is concerned with regulating relations of residents in buildings with several flats. It also regulates the tenant-owner relations, and investor-buyer relations. The predominance of the issue of ownership, purchase and use of dwelling indicate the emphasis on dwelling as property. Some of the important issues linked to homelessness, like evictions and emergency dwellings, are not addressed. Only rental housing is mentioned to alleviate housing access for vulnerable groups, albeit in a very general manner.

However, some changes can be observed when compared to the first period of transition. Housing in its shelter role is partly acknowledged in the policy document ‘National Housing Programme (2000)’, which defines state actions in the housing field until 2009. The goal of the programme is:

> to enable everyone to realise their basic right to suitable housing in appropriate time in Republic of Slovenia, combining individual’s effort and the community help’ (National housing programme 2000).

The main problems mentioned in the programme are the differences between housing supply and demand and the very low level of new building. This is linked to general housing shortage and not specifically to that for vulnerable groups. Among the main goals of the programme is providing aid to those who are not able to sustain a dwelling themselves and with adequate housing supply ensure the care of vulnerable groups. This indicates an important change in policy views. Also measures of alleviating housing vulnerability are described, such as: rent subsidies, increases in the stock of non-profit and social dwellings and mortgage loans. The majority of the supported housing forms are described as being part
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Insufficient policy measures to address the housing needs of the vulnerable

During the period of transition, housing policies and their measures were dramatically changed. Housing reforms generally started with significant reductions and even cuts in most of the previous subsidies to the housing sphere (dissolution of the previous system), and many of the previously working policy measures were abolished, while the introduction of new measures was much slower, particularly in building new safety-net provisions.

The survey carried out by the Council of Europe (Tosics and Edrosi, 2000) analysed the measures that countries in transition have adopted to assist the vulnerable population in their access to housing, and compared them to other EU countries. They distinguished between policy measures aimed directly at vulnerable groups (demand side measures) and those that are directed to providers of services for vulnerable groups (supply side measures). The accession countries were found to have significantly fewer policy measures than EU countries: for the first type of policy measures, the average in applicant countries was 2.4 against 3.5 in the EU; for the second type of measures, the figures were 0.91 and 1.85 respectively. In comparison to EU countries, this group of countries seem to be particularly slow in developing provider oriented measures. Similar patterns were also reported in figures about the NGOs engagement in provision of services for the vulnerable population. The average number of such services varies significantly across groups of countries – from over 4.25 among EU countries, to a little over 2.18 in applicant countries. The results indicated a considerable lagging behind of the CEE countries in general and in Slovenia specifically, in the ability of their governments to address the housing needs of the vulnerable groups and, consequently, also to recognise these needs.

Subsequent development in Slovenia has been slow. The main current instruments for the vulnerable in the housing area are: (1) financial (rent subsidies, one-time social aid, housing loans), (2) permanent housing (non-profit sector) and (3) temporary shelters, outreach services, housing groups and similar. The first two instruments are stagnant or even diminishing. The rental sector has already been

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The absence of the issue of homelessness in the housing policy documents confirms the fact that in Slovenia homelessness is not seen as a housing issue. Therefore, very relevant are other policies and programmes, connected with social security and welfare issues where homelessness is addressed (for example The National Social Protection Programme until 2005 (2000), The programme of the fight against poverty and social exclusion (2000) and the National action plan on social inclusion 2004-2006).
described and we will not repeat the description here. Favourable housing loans by the state have been significantly reduced after the transition (currently they are provided by the Housing fund under the National housing saving scheme) (see Mandič et al. 2004). Also the general accessibility of financial aid has been diminishing, due to more restricted conditions of access to various social rights, like stricter entitlement criteria (Černak Meglič, 2006). Rent subsidies have decreased significantly after 1991 (see Mandič et al. 2004). Furthermore, this instrument was even further restricted in 2005 by an even lower eligibility threshold (Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning 2005). However, the Housing Act has been recently amended (in 2008) to include also people in the market rental sector to be eligible for subsidies (under certain conditions).

The supply side instruments (number 3 above) have been most extensively developed in recent years. Shelter and other services for the homeless have been developed in the period of transition and their number has been slowly increasing in the last decade (National Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, 2007). There is also evident a more targeted approach through emergency units and specific shelters (e.g. young drug misusers). However, as Črnak Meglič (2005) argues, the development of private sector and of voluntary services is quite slow and still does not represent a growth in service delivery, even 15 years after the independence. This can be seen in the low share that social services represent in the non-profit, voluntary sector, i.e. 3.6% in 2005 (Kolarič et al 2006). This is lower than in other post-socialist countries, and much lower than in European countries (Salomon et al 2003).

**Recognising the problem**

Here, the question is raised about the extent to which the problem of homelessness has been initially recognised. First, let us look at the policy makers in the CEE countries. It was established earlier in this chapter that, in transition countries, significant new generators of housing vulnerability have been created and, at the same time, there are only relatively weak policies to tackle these problems. In such circumstances, and relying on common sense, one would expect homelessness to be a burning problem and a much debated issue. Based on empirical evidence, Tosics and Erdosi (2000: 32) argue that the opposite was the case. Confronted with larger problems and diminished resources, the CEE countries – according to the ministerial pronouncements – were more reluctant to recognise and confront the problem than the more developed European countries. It seemed that the housing issue was not recognised and that the perception in the CEE countries was still based on the notion that citizens had a right to housing and that housing was therefore not problematic, even though the housing policies in reality changed from ‘providing’ to ‘enabling’.
However, it is quite different in the local context, where policy officials are confronted directly with housing vulnerability and find it more difficult to escape the pressure of the groups in need. Perhaps it is the local level that is much more responsive to such problems and tends to find solutions. In Slovenia, for instance, shelters for the homeless and emergency housing were first implemented by Ljubljana local authorities, and only afterwards recognised at the national level.

However, the presence of the issue in policy and the public agenda has slowly increased. This is, for example, reflected in recent policy changes (amendments of the Housing Act in 2008) that put more emphasis on housing vulnerability and with a more targeted approach at the vulnerable in the housing area (e.g. changes in definitions of measures of the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia). Since 2000 there has also been a constant or even slowly increasing media coverage of homelessness issues and some of the activities in civil society that have brought this issue more to the fore of public discourse – for example by establishing a street newspaper (see Razpotnik and Dekleva 2007; Filipovič, 2008). However, analysis of the media has shown that at the present time the role of policies and of political actors in helping the homeless population is still not very evident (Filipovič, 2008, Razpotnik and Dekleva 2007).

Conclusion

In this article we have described how the transition countries have treated the issue of homelessness in their public policy formulations. We have tried to document how the transitional period has led to a strengthening in the structural causes of housing vulnerability and homelessness in Slovenia. It has also been pointed out how policies dealing with housing were dominated by other issues. Further, it has been suggested that housing policies, particularly their safety-net provisions, were impoverished and their development delayed. Governments have increasingly tended to rely on the emerging housing market mechanisms, while the measures to regulate them are still embryonic. Yet at the same time a variety of new social risks have emerged, such as unemployment, poverty and housing vulnerability in a free housing market which is not yet properly regulated to protect the consumer. Under such circumstances a growing part of the population is exposed to housing vulnerability and even homelessness as its extreme form.

The fact that, the issue of homelessness did not manage to get onto the policy agenda for almost a decade has been often explained by the pressing urgency of economic issues; in this context welfare issues needed to be delayed. For instance, in an analysis of housing reforms in CEE countries, World Bank experts have distinguished two phases in the reform tasks; only after the first-phase tasks have been
concluded (dissolving elements of the old system through cuts in subsidies and privatisation), can the second phase (building social safety-net provisions) be expected (Hegedus, Mayo, Tosics 1996).

In contrast to this approach, which interprets a decade long suffering of vulnerable groups merely as the ‘unintended consequence’ of reform tasks, others (see Przeworski 1991, Stark and Bruszt 1998) understand this as the ‘social cost of transition’. In housing, this ‘cost’ was disproportionately passed on to the most vulnerable groups.

The first consequence of this social cost of transition is a ‘democratic deficit’. This involves keeping vulnerable groups and their advocates away from the policy arena. Without the possibility of articulating the needs and interests of vulnerable groups in the policy arena homelessness remains a ‘non-issue’. The second consequence is the way in which homelessness is ‘framed’ as a policy issue and related to social policy rhetoric. In contrast to the ‘inclusive’ orientation in EU policies, the debates in CEE countries have tended to have a much more ‘exclusionary’ dictum, which to a great extent replaced the previous ‘universalist’ principle. The focus is on the ‘criteria of eligibility’; the debates in the policy arena are fixated on creating and enforcing barriers and borders, thus including one group and excluding another, and avoiding democratic discussion of wider policy issues.

However, it seems that after the first decade of transition, gradual changes and improvements can be noticed in this area. Slowly, policy measures aimed at helping the most vulnerable are more numerous and more diversified. Also, the recognition of housing vulnerability in policy and public discourse is more pronounced. These could be linked to the influence of the EU and the emphasis it puts on social inclusion in its policies. It could also be a ‘natural’ and necessary development due to the increased problems that occurred as a consequence of policies and changed structural circumstances in the first transition period.
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Homelessness, Post-Fordist Solidarity and Disciplining Urbanism

Henk Meert & Karen Stuyck

Introduction

The mid-1980s marked a change in policy-related attitudes towards the homeless in the western world. These changes clearly reflect a more repressive trend. In New York City for instance, by the late 1980s there was already a pervasive local policy which linked homelessness with mental illness, a linkage frequently reinforced by the press (Mathieu 1993). The ‘medicalisation’ of homelessness was used to divert attention from the socio-economic roots of the problem and to justify the removal of homeless people from public spaces. In the European context, Maas (2004, p.27), using the example of Luxembourg, points to the increasingly limited access to urban public space for the homeless. He argues that public space is in fact the only space that the homeless have for living: it is the ‘resource’ space of homeless people. As Maas reports, in Luxembourg, there has been a generalised crackdown in the name of law and order, a consequence of which is that public space is frequently ‘cleaned’ in order to remove the homeless. Further, squats have being shut down and private security guards are now a common sight in superstores and other pressure points in the town (Maas 2004, p.24). Cabrera's (2004) analysis of the press coverage of homelessness by El Mundo and El País in Spain’s major cities (between January 2003 and June 2004) also highlights changing attitudes towards the homeless. He found a continuous trickle of news items where the victims of violent events are usually found to be homeless people. In 31 of 35 articles, where tragic events took place, the homeless turned out to be the victims, whereas only in 4 were they the attackers, and even in these few cases the victim was usually

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also a homeless person. Cabrera stresses that these are far from being isolated cases; he cites evidence from *El Mundo* that ‘more than 4,000 aggressions are committed in Spain each year by neo-Nazi and fascist groups, especially on immigrants, indigents, homosexuals, prostitutes and youths who look different (hippies, the long-haired, etc.)’. Cabrera further argues that among the most disturbing cases reported was the case where a group of ‘well-to-do’ young people were arrested in Barcelona ‘accused of humiliating beggars and recording it on video,… just to have fun’ (2004, p.21).

These examples suggest that roofless people are continuously confronted with a hostile (urban) environment, which victimises them for residing in public places. At first sight, this suggests Smith’s notion of a ‘revanchist urbanism’, entailing a post-industrial urban landscape which: ‘… portends a vicious reaction against minorities, the working class, homeless people, the unemployed, women gays and lesbians, immigrants’ (Smith 1996, p.211).

It is important to pay specific attention to the notion of revanchism, as used and interpreted by Smith. *Revanche* in French means revenge, and the revanchists comprised a political movement that formed in France in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Angered by the increased liberalism of the Second Republic, the ignominious defeat of Bismarck, and the establishment of the Paris Commune (1870-1871) – in which the Paris working class vanquished the defeated government of Napoleon III and held the city for several months – the revanchists organized a movement of revenge and reaction against both the working class and the discredited royalty (Smith 1996, p.45). Revanchism thus supposes a conqueror that has to be defeated. In a present-day context, Smith’s revanchism refers to the liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s which since the early-1990s has been the central focus of a current vengeful, right-wing reaction in the United States (1996, p.45).

According to Smith (2002), revanchism goes hand in hand with a specific urban culture, leading towards the revanchist city. He links the emergence of a revanchist urbanism to two interrelated socio-spatial processes. First, the ongoing globalisation and flexibility of capitalist accumulation strategies which urge local authorities to stabilise the social climate in cities to safeguard the prosperity of the city and its inhabitants by preventing class and race-based struggles which would deter investment. Hence, heightened state activism and the emergence of a more authoritarian and controlling state can be seen as an outcome of this new policy. Second, most neo-liberal cities have also experience the impact of gentrification. Smith argues, the present wave of gentrification relies on a consortium of city governments and private capital, in which public authorities subsidise the private market-led transformation of the urban built environment (2002, p.440). Urban revanchism is then, following Smith, clearly linked to the continuation of the ongoing gentrification process in western
cities. In sum, as MacLeod states, these revanchist interventions appear to be ‘reclaiming public spaces for those groups who possess economic value as consumers to the virtual exclusion of the less well-heeled’ (2002, p.606).

In this chapter, the new revanchist urbanism is critically dealt with. Our point of departure is the changing patterns of solidarity with the homeless. Based on fieldwork in the inner city of Brussels (Belgium) we first argue that solidarity towards the homeless has recently (since the mid-1980s) become more conditional than before. This trend goes hand in hand with new forms of social exclusion, informalisation, and new categories of disorder in public space. Our fieldwork shows that the notion of revenge is too specific and therefore not applicable to the homeless people we studied: they did not win a war and they do not specifically reflect the so-called liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s. ‘Revenge’ is out of order here. The opposite is true, homelessness is an age-old phenomenon in west European cities and, in the case of Les Marolles – a deprived area in central Brussels and our field study location – the homeless were effectively ‘stowed away’ in a ‘niche-neighborhood’ of the Brussels urban arena. Hence, there is nothing to seek revenge for; there is no conqueror that needs to be reprimanded. When assessing solidarity practices towards the homeless, it becomes clear that many agents combine these practices with disciplining practices. Rather than taking revenge, they aim to ‘correct’, and in the most extreme situations to ‘remove’ a specific social group that has within living memory been located in this long-time deprived neighbourhood. As an alternative to ‘revanchism’ we introduce here the notion of ‘disciplining urbanism’: a term that embraces a well-defined set of human practices which correct and – if required – remove those who were once seen as the normal occupants of specific neighbourhoods because they no longer ‘fit’ with the new values and norms which are imposed on the neighbourhood by the newcomers.

Hence, in this chapter we first analyse new forms of solidarity and then highlight more concrete expressions of solidarity with the homeless in the rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood of Les Marolles. Our findings are based on interviews with a wide range of actors: representatives of public bodies and ministries, services for the homeless, security guards, gentrifiers, merchants who claim the same public space as the homeless, and finally the homeless themselves. Our analysis makes clear that post-Fordist solidarity goes hand in hand with new exclusionary mechanisms, with new categories of disorder in public space and with a disciplining urbanism.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the following sections, we discuss first the broader socio-economic context in which the present organisation of solidarity with the homeless should be situated; specifically we examine the post-Fordist restructuring of society and the related emergence of extreme-right discourse about solidarity. In a second section, the research methodology is explained, while the third
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section deals with the basic characteristics of Les Marolles, the Brussels neighbourhood in which was the location for our fieldwork. Before concluding the chapter, we explain how new forms of solidarity are linked to the visibility of the homeless in public spaces and explore the combination of solidarity practices with disciplining urbanism for six key-actors in the contemporary urban scene of Brussels.

The way post-Fordism and the extreme right challenge the universalist notion of solidarity

Solidarity as a research object

Solidarity cannot simply be understood in terms of static, one-dimensional and black-and-white categories (Van Oorschot, 1997). Solidarity is always contextually situated. At the same time and seen from a micro perspective, social reality can be conceived as a framework which takes shape as a consequence of human interrelations. Therefore, solidarity is always connected to a very complex and dynamic set of human relations. These relations, clearly situated in time and space, are always created in a concrete context of specific events and topics. This explains why statements about solidarity can be contradictory, confused and chaotic. This does not mean that people who talk about solidarity are themselves contradictory, confused or chaotic, rather that in order to understand the creation and altering of solidarity at the micro-level, it is important to use qualitative research methodologies, such as ethnography (see the following section on methodology). Solidarity then becomes a concrete research object, which has to be assessed as part of the lived and living reality, emerging at the micro level, but always reflecting influences of trends and processes which are at stake at a higher societal level.

Within the empirical context of this research, two macro social processes were of particular interest: first, the transition towards a post-Fordist society – entailing inter alia an important redefinition of the welfare state – and second, the rise and breakthrough of the political extreme-right. These macro-social events have a very wide range and a very great depth. They not only influence the question of solidarity, they also bear a strong influence on a variety of social fields, such as education, access to the labour market, democracy and so on.

The transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society

The transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society can be summarily described as a switch from a model based on productivity and collective services (with the State as the key-provider), towards a new model in which trade, services and knowledge are central and welfare and its redistribution are individualised. In this new post-Fordist model, the State is no longer the central actor in redistribution of
wealth. Its new role is to provide the conditions and to build the framework used by the different social actors in order to distribute wealth. This is a far-reaching transition which covers the whole Western world. It entails a fundamental change of the goals which the State aims for: from an effective equality towards latent equal opportunities. The transition also entails a shift of emphasis: from the effectiveness of the State as a provider with a universalist approach to solidarity, towards the individual as a self-provider. The State no longer guarantees employment; individuals have to make themselves employable for which the State creates a set of requisite conditions: education, (extra) training, coaching etc. To achieve these targets, the State makes use of punitive practices against those who do not fully take on responsibility themselves to avoid social exclusion. Thus, the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism does not mean that the State no longer ‘cherishes’ the principle of equality (see De Decker 2004), however, the transition from ‘equal opportunities’ (which the State – in theory – ensures) towards effective equality’ has become the responsibility of the individual.

The rise and breakthrough of the extreme-right
Historically, the breakthrough of the extreme-right is related to the deep economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. Although, this is a European wide observation, e.g. illustrated by the Front National in France, the FPÖ in Austria and the Vlaams Blok in Flanders (see De Decker et al 2005), its geographical diffusion is more limited than the former mentioned transition towards a post-Fordist society. Nevertheless, in Belgium at least, both processes perfectly match. One of the effects of this political radicalisation is a sharpening of a whole series of debates about solidarity. In a federal country such as Belgium, the solidarity between the two most important regions, that is Wallonia and Flanders, is discussed and overtly called into question. The same is true regarding solidarity between the host society and immigrants. Hence, the extreme right has a clear effect on the debates about the criteria for granting solidarity in that it opts for very narrow definitions of eligibility, based on very specific categorical identities: ethnicity, religion and nationality. Therefore, the principle of equality, which was typical for the Fordist welfare regime, is further eroded. Moreover, the extreme-right has also a deep formative influence on the development of specific policy fields: immigration and safety are crucial issues in manifestoes of extreme-right political parties (De Maesschalck & Loopmans 2003).

The consequences of both societal trends are considerable. We distinguish two central effects. First, the new role of the State gives cause for the development of the so-called ‘Third Sector’ (Mingione 1991): a whole blend of (often subsidised) civil-society organisations and individual actors, entailing private enterprises (also informal), volunteer groups, religious or confessional organisations and so on which play a key-role in organising solidarity. Second, the way the State prescribes a set
of criteria in order to define the limits of eligibility leads to a complex situation, entailing that criteria for eligibility which are applicable to one specific social field not always match necessarily with criteria defining the eligibility for another social field. Illegal immigrants for instance are not eligible for political asylum. However, one can assume that they should be eligible for relief in shelters for the homeless, yet their daily experiences show that this is not always the case. This proves that criteria prescribing eligibility in one domain can neutralise and even counteract criteria in another domain.

**Research Methodology**

The ethnographical approach of the underlying research of this chapter was based primarily on a series of in-depth-interviews with several key-actors in the present debate and daily organisation of solidarity with the homeless people: policymakers, third sector organisations (such as grassroots committees, Salvation Army, community workers and so on), individual citizens (young gentrifying residents), (trendy) local shop-keepers, security guards and the homeless themselves. Table 1 gives an overview of the different kind of respondents and corresponding numbers of interviews. All interviews were performed in Les Marolles (except for the security guards), one of Brussels best known deprived neighbourhoods, currently undergoing a subtle process of gentrification (see next section). To investigate the role which is played by (semi-) private security guards regarding solidarity and disciplining activities towards the homeless, extra fieldwork was performed in the Brussels South Station. This is very close to Les Marolles and is a public space where the homeless traditionally find their niche.
Table 1: Overview of interviews performed in Les Marolles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of agency/household</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Makers and public bodies</td>
<td>Brussels Regional Government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City of Brussels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Social Welfare Agency of Brussels</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policemen</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Guards</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third sector organisations</td>
<td>Services for the homeless</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Rental Agencies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community workers – NGOs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private security services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens (gentrifiers), aged 25 to 40, no children</td>
<td>Single households</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With partner</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders</td>
<td>Trendy business (antiquarian and pub)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily food</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supermarket</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless (all Belgians)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews were not, initially, rigidly structured and were therefore regarded in the initial phase as narratives: conversations in which people pass on experiences, feelings, opinions and anecdotes relating to the neighbourhood in which they live and/or work; perspectives constructed by themselves, with all the ingredients, characteristics and associations involved. The conclusion of the interviews followed a stricter course aimed at presenting an identical set of issues to each respondent. Therefore, an underlying questionnaire was used to gather comparable information from each respondent. As a result, mutual comparison became possible on a heuristic basis.

The questionnaire included topics about the neighbourhood (e.g. its socio-demographic evolution, gentrification,…) ; aspects of territoriality and the concrete use of space (by the homeless and other people who live and work in the neighbourhood) ; solidarity (emic definitions and categorisations, role of the state and private institutions,…) ; the Brussels housing market (prices, barriers to access, quality,…) and finally, the working of police services (prevention versus repression, private versus public security services,…) . Interviews with homeless people paid particular attention to their daily life and corresponding use of public space. Within the context
of this chapter we focus mainly on discourses about (conditional) solidarity which – as we will further illustrate for particular urban key-players – often reflect and underpin the dominant discourse of a disciplining urbanism.

Young urban households and the ‘subtle’ gentrification of Les Marolles neighbourhood

Les Marolles neighbourhood is situated in the southern part of the historic centre of Brussels, demarcated to the south by the so-called Pentagon which is the 14th ring-wall of the mediaeval city (Fig. 1). The neighbourhood is also located at about 500 meters from the Grand Place (to the North) and about 300 m from the South Station (to the south, with international train connections to France and the UK – Eurostar).

Figure 1: Situation of Les Marolles neighbourhood
From the middle ages, Les Marolles has served as a traditional gateway to the city of Brussels, housing immigrants and poor (there are still a lot of religious congregations and a large hospital present in the neighbourhood; see Mistiaen, 2002). Those who were rejected from society (Les Marolles hosted the leper colony of the city) or those who wanted to deploy an alternative lifestyle, found here a place to live. This otherness is still reflected in the neighbourhood’s infrastructure. Three examples illustrate this. First, it is still the location for the largest second-hand market in Brussels. Second, the neighbourhood is dominated by the Palace of Justice, a nineteenth century urban intervention to discipline and to control the deviant behaviour of the neighbourhood’s residents (Guldentops et al, 2001, p. 17). Within the same socio-historical context, two new straight-lined streets were also carved out in this neighbourhood (the rue Haute and the rue Blaes) in Haussmanian style, leading towards the breaking-up of the chaotic and difficult to control Mediaeval street pattern of Les Marolles the site for working class revolts (Smets 1985a; Smets 1985b). Third, a particular kind of infrastructure also reflects the historical deprivation of Les Marolles, that is its age-old reception infrastructure for the homeless (often embedded in a religious charitable context). As Figure 2 shows, there is a clear concentration of different kinds of infrastructure in this neighbourhood. However, this map also points out that most recent initiatives were no longer established in this part of Les Marolles; there is a clear shift of new projects to the western part of the historic city centre. This evolution may reflect two interrelated trends: the subtle upgrading of Les Marolles and the further marginalisation of the western part of the city centre (receiving some of the evicted households from Les Marolles), which neighbours the Molenbeek district (Fig. 1), one of Brussels’ most deprived areas (Demeulder, 1996; Meert, 2000). The increase of services is in itself linked to a general retrenchment of direct state intervention (Edgar et al, 1999).
According to the 2001 census, about 4,750 people live in Les Marolles. Of course, this figure excludes those people who are not officially registered, such as the homeless and the undocumented and illegal immigrants (at present there is no accurate estimation of their number in the neighbourhood). Despite the impact of gentrification, census data still betray the desperate socio-economic position of the neighbourhood. Figure 3 shows for the Brussels Capital Region changes in the taxable incomes per inhabitant between 1996 and 2001 (with correction for inflation). Notwithstanding the ongoing gentrification, the neighbourhood is characterised by only modest increases, together with some decreases, in average incomes. These changes can be explained by the arrival of mostly rather young urban pioneers, who recently rediscovered the assets of the city and who embody the gentrification process in Les Marolles. Between 1991 and 1998, the neighbourhood showed a significant increase of young adults, resulting in a much younger profile compared with the situation in the Brussels Capital Region. The share of the age group of 20-34 years increased from 19% in 1991 to 25% in 1998 (Guldentops et al, 2001; De Clercq et al, 2000, p.76-78). Because of their specific position in the life cycle, their household income is rather modest, which explains the limited impact they have had on the
changes in average income in the neighbourhood between the mid-1990s and 2001. Moreover, about 50 % of the neighbourhood’s population has a non-Belgian nationality\(^2\), lives in large families and has been hit by high unemployment (in 1991\(^3\) less than one out of three people between 15 and 64 years old were active in the labour market). The yearly average income was only 5,040 Euro per inhabitant in 1996, compared to 10,460 Euro per inhabitant in the Brussels Capital Region\(^4\).

\textbf{Figure 3: Income Change 1996-2001 (with correction for inflation)}

\(^2\) Because of naturalisations (people of a non-Belgian origin receiving the Belgian nationality, the real share may be considerably higher).

\(^3\) Unfortunately, the latest data available

\(^4\) Especially the larger size of immigrant families in Les Marolles, compared to the dominance of single households at regional level, explains the gap between these income data per inhabitant.
The general housing quality also reflects the deprived situation of Les Marolles. Figure 4 illustrates that nearly 15% of the dwellings lack basic amenities (which means that there is no toilet inside the dwelling and/or that there is also no private bathroom available in the dwelling). The fact that this situation is not as dramatic as for example in the western belt of neighbourhoods around the mediaeval city centre is due to the relatively high number of social rental dwellings in Les Marolles (25%, compared to only 10% for the Brussels Capital Region – Guldentops et al, 2001). Indeed, in the 1970s an urban renewal programme was developed for Les Marolles which included the construction of social rental dwellings. Compared to the privately owned or rented dwellings, which were erected in the 19th and the early 20th century, the post second world war social rental sector reflects a higher construction standard. On the other hand, this relatively high share of social rental dwellings also explains the general low incomes of households in this neighbourhood.

The mixture of old private sector dwellings, social rental dwellings and the very recently gentrified dwellings points to a general spatial configuration of poor housing conditions (comprised of privately owned and rented dwellings, combined with the social rental sector), in which small-scale islands of wealth are embedded, occupied by the gentrifiers.
However, gentrification in Les Marolles is not only a tale of young, mainly single residents who discovered in the early-1990s this relative cheap housing market. Since the late 1980s, more and more up-market antiquarian shops, trendy bars and restaurants discovered the neighbourhood. In fact, this reflects the extension of clearly upmarket facilities which dominate an adjacent neighbourhood ("Le Sablon") into Les Marolles. Moreover, the Brussels Capital Region has encouraged this trend by subsidising commercial entrepreneurship by the so-called ‘commercial centres contracts’ in traditional commercial streets (such as the rue Haute and the rue Blaes in Les Marolles) which had experienced a period of decay.

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5 Which is French for ‘The Sand’. ‘Sablonisation’ is even currently used in Brussels to denote the process of residential gentrification accompanied by the location of trendy shops, bars and restaurants.
Following on both these components of gentrification (residential and commercial) public spaces are no longer exclusively used by the homeless, local residents and low-budget consumers which frequented the neighbourhood for its survival infrastructure (e.g. the flea market). In the following section, we will assess whether and to what extent gentrifying residents and middle and high-class consumers now claim access to public space in Les Marolles, together with fashionable shop and barkeepers who install outdoor cafés on the footpaths. This last mentioned example evidently points to a subtle ‘privatisation’ of the public space in Les Marolles. However, amidst these competing claims, as we show in the next section, homeless people still rely mainly on the public space of Les Marolles to organise their daily activities.

Categorisations of solidarity and disciplining urbanism

Conditional solidarity and public space as a last resort

Until 1993, the Belgian policy towards the homeless was characterised by two simple key-features: anti-urbanism and repression. Indeed, until then, a 1891 law prescribed that all vagrants (the term homeless was not yet used) who were encountered while sleeping or begging in public spaces and who did not possess a basic sum of money, were to be removed to so-called colonies in the rural periphery of the country (e.g. in the Northern Campines of Flanders or in the Walloon Ardennes). These particular penitentiaries effectively removed them from pernicious influence of the cities, and were designed to impart discipline and social norms, values and regularity (in their daily life). These colonies took the form of self-provisioning institutions, with cattle breeding and horticulture for the community of vagrants who were compelled to live there for a specific period by way of punishment for having lived as a vagrant (Depreeuw, 1996). They were in effect prisons: people were not allowed to leave them until sanctioned.

However, the severe economic and related housings crisis of the mid-1980s produced an increasing number of homeless people who were evicted from their dwelling or who were excluded from other safety-nets or socially integrating mechanisms (such as the labour market). City centres were confronted with an increasing number of so-called vagrants/homeless. Hence, the ‘demand versus the supply’ offered by the colonies became structurally unbalanced, resulting in a new federal law in 1993. This law mentioned homelessness for the first time: the vagrant was transformed into a homeless person. In contrast to vagrancy, homelessness was no longer to be punishable according to the legislator. People who were at the time confined in colonies, were now to be treated in special reception centres which would prepare them for reintegration in society. In contrast to the peripheral location of the colonies, the reception centres run by third sector organisations were located
in the neighbourhoods where the majority of the homeless actually lived (see Figure 2), that is mainly in 19th century deprived neighbourhoods. However, the following quote from an interview with an older homeless male reveals a reality in which public spaces in city centres still remain to a large extent the ‘abode’ for many homeless people:

But, if you slept on the street or in the railway station, then they asked: Can we see your pass [identity card]. They would wake you, asked you for your pass and also [whether] you have money with you? “Yes, I have money. OK, they said. But, without money, you were picked up as a vagrant and they sent you straight to Wortel [a colony in the north of Belgium]. I’ve stayed there for more than thirteen years. Now, Wortel does not exist any more, thus, many people live on the street, those people can go nowhere. Maybe for one night in a night shelter, but that’s it. But also these reception centres, they become overfull.

The presence of homeless people in the streets of Brussels is not only related to the under-capacity of the reception centres. The fact that the bulk of homeless services are situated near the city centre means that many homeless people use the public space during the day for begging, for resting, or socialising (Rollinson, 1998; Heuts, 2001); this makes them a very visible group in public space.

The abolition of the colonies for vagrants went hand in hand with the creation of various types of services for the homeless, which are no longer under direct control and responsibility of the state, but subsidised. One of these particular services in Brussels is an outreach service, specialising in street work among the homeless. During an interview with a street-worker of one of these services it became clear that not all ‘homeless’ people were viewed as equal. The context for this interview is important: shortly before our interview, a group of about 15 Afghan people who had to sleep a series of nights in the open air in the centre of the Molenbeek district attracted considerable attention from the national media.

Q: At the time that a group of Afghan people stayed in front of the church of Molenbeek, did you do something for them?

A: No. We saw it in the press….we observed it….These people have the right to have a bed, however, I don’t think it is correct that these people can claim the beds of the homeless. These people have no homelessness problem. These people have a financial problem because of their administrative situation…. I don’t think the homeless sector has to receive these people. There is always a shortage of beds in Brussels, if the State takes its responsibility for these people then there will not be such a big shortage of beds for the homeless…. You can build ten more night shelters, they will always be filled with illegals....
This quote is instructive in that it shows explicitly how street-workers construct two categories among the people that they find at night in the streets of Brussels: deserving homeless and non-deserving homeless, the latter category even literally described as having “no homelessness problem”. To make this distinction, they refer implicitly to the general immigration and asylum policy of the state. The fact that the state hardly grants these people any degree of citizenship is an argument for the service providers to refuse them access to their services. The argument is ambiguous: on the one hand they are not allowed by the state to take care of them (as we stated already, this is a matter of clashing criteria of eligibility in different domains: asylum policy and homelessness policy); on the other hand their discourse reflects some notions of resistance to the policy of the state and thus their refusal to take care of these people is also a way to confront the state with its ‘heartless’ policy towards the homeless; still from another point of view their argument also leans towards the clear request of the ‘native’ homeless who frequently make their complaints about the presence of immigrants in the homeless services in Brussels. The following quote of a homeless Belgian female shows a remarkable similarity to the wording of the street worker:

I don’t know, but these foreigners who come from all kinds of countries, and maybe there are problems in their country, I will believe this, but they have first of all to consider our people who are in trouble. And then, yes, looking after the others…. among us, there are also problems; and these are much more numerous than we think

Moreover, a high-rank official of the Brussels Capital Region also distinguishes between homeless groups which should be helped and which should not:

… Brussels is saddled with a range of problems which are an issue for the Federal State….. If we throw open the receptions centres for everyone, then you will get serious conflicts between local residents and immigrants. This is what you have for instance with Pierre d’Angle [a reception centre in the centre of Brussels], and with the CASU [another centre in Brussels] you have also a problem people who come there at night to sleep and organise themselves. At certain times, you get a clash of groups who think that this [i.e. the service centres] has to be theirs.

As this quote illustrates, this government official, with a long experience regarding homelessness in Brussels, identifies here a specific construction of solidarity: indeed, he excludes a group of people who are according to him are not entitled to accommodation in reception centres (despite the fact that they are on the street). To argue this, he relies on an institutional logic: it is not the responsibility of the
government of the Brussels Capital Region to subsidise homeless services for people who are de facto homeless because of the inadequate policies of the Federal State regarding undocumented immigrants.

In sum, despite the founding and the continued working of several services for the homeless in the city centre of Brussels since the mid-1980s, public space is continuously consolidated as the last and only resort for homeless people. This makes the homeless a category of people which is on a permanent basis extremely visible in streets, markets, squares, railway stations and other forms of public space. In the following section we assess definitions and practices of solidarity in relation to the homeless, as different social groups who work and live in Les Marolles identified them during interviews. Moreover, it is of particular interest to understand how these expressions of solidarity are linked to the visibility of the homeless and related perceptions of disorder and how these expressions unravel aspects of a disciplining urbanism.

Practices of conditional solidarity and disciplining urbanism

The search for (new forms of) solidarity and specific disciplining practices towards the homeless was assessed regarding different key-players in the concerned neighbourhood: third sector initiatives (social rental agencies – SRA), residential gentrifiers, traditional and trendy (gentrifying) traders (including a large-scale, market-led and solidarity related supermarket), and security guards at work in the South Station. One of the key-findings – and one that challenges Smith’s thesis of a revanchist urbanism, which is embedded in a discourse of violence against otherness – is that otherness is counteracted by a combination of solidarity and disciplining practices. The present-day urban culture in which the homeless are embedded and approached by different urban key-players, is not purely hostile and revanchist, it also comprises practices of solidarity. However, not all urban key-players combine solidarity and disciplining practices to the same extent. Figure 5 attempts to categorise all (theoretically) possible combinations of solidarity and disciplining. In what follows, we use this schema to unravel the practices and discourses of the key-players in their interaction with homeless people in Les Marolles.
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

Figure 5: Combinations of solidarity and disciplining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional donors</th>
<th>Institutional correcting donors</th>
<th>Market-led correcting donors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional shop and bar keepers</td>
<td>Social rental agencies</td>
<td>Large-scale consumption industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerants</td>
<td>Opportunists</td>
<td>Removers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young gentrifiers</td>
<td>Trendy shop and bar keepers</td>
<td>Private security guards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Part of the deal": young residential gentrifiers in Les Marolles ("The Tolerants")

As previously noted, the gentrifiers of Les Marolles are chiefly young, higher-educated single households or couples without children who recently discovered the neighbourhood. Most of them purchased a dwelling from the Brussels Regional Development Agency. They like the multicultural atmosphere of Les Marolles and they see it as part of the deal ("they tolerate") that some inconveniences may occur due to the fact that they live in this specific neighbourhood. Their high standard dwellings are spatially grouped in small-scale housing initiatives amid the wider deprivation which characterises the neighbourhood. When these newcomers in Les Marolles were asked about their general appraisal of the neighbourhood, the dominant discourse was as follows:

But you can see... the contrast with these areas [meaning her gentrified niche]... for instance in the rue des Tanneurs, there you have still a social housing estate of the 70s, you have the same situation nearby the Palace of Justice, and around the rue Blaes. You know, these places really become islands of marginality, because this neighbourhood will never be improved. And I regret this. I’m afraid of it. It makes me also feel unsafe (Women with a university degree, living with partner).

This quote illustrates how newcomers perceive their new environment which entails places of ‘we’ and places of ‘them’. Moreover, it is striking that the concept of ‘island’ is used to refer to the older and much larger parts of the neighbourhood, instead of the actual pockets of wealth in which the newcomers reside. When asked about possible solidarity with the poor people in the neighbourhood, the common answer was that this is a task of the State, not of the inhabitants or volunteers. Thus these newcomers develop a passive attitude towards the social deprivation of their neighbourhood. They do not contribute actively to the redistribution of wealth in
Les Marolles, a plea for the State to fulfil its role reveals in fact a Fordist reflection: redistribution of tax incomes have to release the neighbourhood from deprivation. Although feelings of danger were expressed, not one of the young gentrifiers who were interviewed associated otherness with a need for more repression. This also illustrates their tolerance towards otherness in their neighbourhood.

*Traditional shop and bar keepers: Conditional donors*

Traditional shop and bar keepers consider solidarity with the poor as one of their tasks to perform in Les Marolles. All the interviewed traditional shop- and bar keepers did give direct support (food and sometimes money) to the homeless. However their solidarity is conditional. Support is clearly reduced, if not refused, to foreigners and to homeless who abuse alcohol, to those who reflect ‘otherness’; in comparison, those who approach normality in the eyes of these donors, benefit from acts of solidarity. A butcher talked about his ‘clientele’ as follows:

Q: Do they [the homeless] come here in the shop to ask something, food for instance?
A: Yes, daily, every day they come to ask for something.
Q: And how do you respond to that?
A: I don’t give them money. Food is OK, however, it depends on who…. You know who should receive something and who doesn’t. Someone who walks around here everyday dead drunk, I don’t give him food. When he has the money to drink, then he also has the money to buy food. Oh yes, we have our fixed clientele. Also many people with children.

*Trendy shop and bar keepers: the opportunists*

It was already revealing that most of the addressed bar and shop keepers who settled recently in the neighbourhood, contributing to the ‘Sablonisation’ process, refused a talk about the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. The most significant information about the new traders, and their willingness or otherwise to express solidarity with the poor and their ideas about how to deal with the presence of the homeless in the streets of Les Marolles, was extracted from interviews with community workers in the neighbourhood. One of them, for example, described how trendy restaurants claim pubic space, at the expense of socially weak people:

Last week, I was passing by the church. There are benches and many homeless people use them, with their dogs, while they drink and so on. There are two little, trendy restaurants which have an outdoor cafe [nearby and are] apparently disturbed by these people on the benches. And these guys, yes sometimes, they
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

are sitting there, shouting and singing, or playing with their dogs. Now they have put big black dustbins on these benches, and they have tied them up with chains, so that nobody can sit on these benches.

This illustration of power expression is symptomatic of the attitude of these new traders: they are not concerned at all about the ups and downs of the neighbourhood. They do their business and they cleverly anticipate and valorise the ‘commercial centres contracts’ which were launched by the Brussels Capital Region in order to revitalise the neighbourhood. This opportunistic attitude is accompanied by a refusal of solidarity with the poor, even in its conditional form. At the same time, they are not afraid of exerting their status of urban renovator to chase away the homeless from public spaces as they suppose that the homeless will damage their image and thus also their commercial activities.

Social Rental Agencies: Institutional correcting donors

In the late 1980s, grassroots organisations introduced the first Social Rental Agencies (SRA) in Belgium (De Decker 2002, and Chapter 1 of this book). SRAs are part of an approach to ensure adequate and affordable housing provision for vulnerable households by socialising the private rental market. During the 1990s, these initiatives were gradually institutionalised. In the Brussels Capital Region, private rented dwellings are mostly ‘socially’ managed by third sector organisations. Notwithstanding the official recognition of SRAs by the State, they are free to develop criteria for allocation of their houses. Most SRAs develop their own view, their own target group and their own interpretation of their task. The SRAs which were interviewed during this research stated clearly that all future tenants have as a condition of residence to receive guidance on managing a household budget. Access to decent housing provided by the SRAs, becomes more and more conditional; these institutions aim to adjust and correct the attitude and the related behaviour of the homeless in relation to housing. The conditions they impose are clearly flavoured by aspects of disciplining practices. They clearly go beyond the more neutral position of the ‘conditional donors’ – the traditional bar and shopkeepers who were not linked with disciplining urbanism. The motive behind such criteria may be to avoid rent arrears. Those who cannot meet these requirements remain reliant on services provided by homeless agencies.

Market-led solidarity: the market-led correcting donors

Until the late 1990s, most of the poorer households of Les Marolles went shopping in a low-budget supermarket which was centrally located in the neighbourhood. The closing of this store was a catastrophe for many. They had to look for alternatives outside Les Marolles or for lower quality food in other, smaller scale shops in the neighbourhood. However, since 2003, a new supermarket with extremely low
prices has located in Les Marolles. The location of this supermarket is the result of a well-defined procedure, reflecting the right of all public social welfare agencies of Belgian municipalities and welfare NGO to apply for the location of such a social supermarket; Carrefour was the selected partner in Les Marolles. Access to this low budget shop is limited by membership:

... people receive a membership pass, but that does not mean that they can come to shop here as long as they want, there is a certain limit which we impose, so that they learn how to manage their budget. The limit we fix is six months or one year (...). Beforehand, our partner [the local welfare agency or a third sector social NGO] has to give us a list of people... to whom they award a membership pass (Communications Officer, Carrefour)

This initiative perfectly reflects the new post-Fordist interpretation of solidarity with the poor. Only a chosen number of inhabitants are allowed to shop in this so-called ‘social supermarket’. Again, a disciplining approach is to the forefront: potential shoppers have to promise that they will learn about managing their budget, so that further financial failures can be prevented. Carrefour also strictly regulates the amount of money people can spend in the social supermarket: 4 Euro a week for adults, 3 Euro a week for children. Prices are extremely low: about 20 % of the prices which are common in the normal supermarkets of Carrefour. The goods that are sold differ each week and they are always defective6, which makes them non-saleable in Carrefour’s normal stores. Moreover, the risk for Carrefour of not selling these products is obviated, in that Carrefour’s local partner purchases all goods before sale, and thereby bears the costs of any loss or shortfall.

Practices of solidarity associated with this large-scale market-led initiative clearly differ from the conditional solidarity organised by the traditional traders in the neighbourhood. With this supermarket, Carrefour aims at correcting the behaviour of the poor, bringing them back on the rails by imparting more disciplined behaviour. Evidently, it is as least as important for Carrefour, if not even more important, to market the bulk of their goods which are in fact no longer saleable according to normal standards.

**Private security guards: the removers**

The limited and small-scale gentrification of the neighbourhood, both commercial and residential, explains the absence of obvious private security guards in the neighbourhood. Control of the neighbourhood is chiefly performed by traditional police services. Therefore, as already explained in our research methodology, we interviewed security guards in the adjacent South Station.

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6 Shelf life of goods should never be a problem. Most goods are sold in this social supermarket because of cracked packing.
B-Security is the internal surveillance service of the Belgian railway company, founded in 1999 and currently staffed with 160 policemen. Their presence is extremely visible in the South Station, together with a series of other police services, such as Group 4, a private company.

The task of these security personnel is to remove potentially disturbing 'otherness', in order that the interests of both commuters, businessmen and traders are not disturbed by the presence of deviating behaviour and uncertainty about their safety. This explains also why the homeless are mostly to be found in the periphery of the South Station, at minor entrances, out of the commercial activity range of the traders in the station. One of the B-Security police who was willing to talk about his job made the following categorisations of the homeless, justifying interventions for removal:

Travellers don’t like it... when someone is lying there on the ground or on a bench, in a waiting room. This makes them feeling unsafe, isn’t that right? I don’t have anything against these guys, however, some are good, and others are bad.... At the entrance to the station, you can find some of them with dogs which sometimes run free intimidating people....

Solidarity is hardly a concern for this group of key-actors. As a guard working for Group 4 said: ‘The only thing which is of interest for me is what I’m asked to do’.

Callous interventions of security guards in the South Station have led to the recently founded ‘Collectif du Midi’, a broad collaboration between grassroots organisations, charitable institutions and services for the homeless. The aim of the Collectif is to counteract the oppressive dimension of current security measures against the homeless in the South Station. They have recently been successful in persuading the security personnel who have responsible for the treatment of the homeless to assuage their dominant security discourse with notions of solidarity.

**Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, solidarity has become an increasingly complex and selective domain within contemporary society. Its complexity is the result of the cutback of linear and automatic solidarity relations which characterised the Fordist welfare state and in which the individual and the State were unambiguously related to each other as provider and client. The tendency towards a post-Fordist interpretation of solidarity entails that an increasing number of actors are involved in the provision of solidarity, going hand in hand with the proliferation of different sets of criteria and mechanisms. From a homeless perspective receiving solidarity entails searching through a complex of different providers, each with their own and frequently mutually clashing criteria.
As a consequence eligibility becomes a central characteristic of solidarity support. Providers have more and more autonomy in defining criteria of accessibility and thus to introduce new forms of eligibility. The government sanctioned and subsidised Social Rental Agencies are, for instance, permitted to refuse access to people who are not willing to learn how to manage their own budgets. Large-scale lucrative initiatives, such as Carrefour can improve their image by providing, in a solidarity-like way, extremely cheap food to a group of poor people who are selected because of their openness towards the disciplining strategies of the providers. Even homeless outreach services relegate specifically defined groups of homeless people to the street. Hence, finding any form of relief means that homeless households have to rely on all kinds of informal assistance and this goes hand in hand with an extended use of public space. Within the context of this perspective, our typology of different combinations of solidarity and disciplining activities (Figure 5) loses its static character and becomes dynamic: in fact, removers such as the private security guards fight the disorder that has been produced by exclusionary mechanisms which are inherent in the post-Fordist organisation of solidarity. In sum: ‘social polarisation/exclusion’, ‘restructuring of solidarity services’ and ‘disorder’ are mutually linked. Unless there is a structural intervention in the two first mentioned processes, the problem of disorder is unsolvable. Disciplining urbanism as a way of tackling disorder in trendy public space is only the last stage in a succession of exclusionary mechanisms. Post-Fordist solidarity thus continuously creates disorder and hence it forms the seedbed for contemporary forms of a disciplining urban culture.

Acknowledgements

The preparation of this chapter was enabled thanks to a grant from the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office. We would like to thank its officers and the members of the steering committee for helpful comments and insights at various stages of the research. We would also like to thank Bruno Meeus for his very constructive comments on a first version of this chapter.
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In my Caravan, I feel like Superman
The Changing Profiles of Homeless People: Conflict, Rooflessness and the Use of Public Space

Henk Meert, Karen Stuyck, Pedro José Cabrera, Evelyn Dyb, Masa Filipovic, Péter Győri, Ilja Hradecký, Marie Loison, and Roland Maas

Editors note: This chapter is a shortened and edited version of a 2006 report prepared by a working group of the European Observatory on Homelessness which Henk coordinated and chaired. The theoretical basis for the work recounted here – as in Chapter Seven – juxtaposes Smith’s theory of ‘revanchism’ with the concept of ‘disciplining urbanism’. In Chapter Seven the focus was on Les Marolles, a central city neighbourhood in Brussels, here the evidence base is widened to include a representative selection of European countries. This chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter Seven.

Introduction

Three central research questions

This chapter has emerged from one of the research working groups of the European Observatory on Homelessness, dealing with the changing profiles of homeless people in the European Union. Fieldwork was executed in seven European member states (the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, Hungary, Belgium) and Norway. In this study we deal with three central questions regarding

the use of public space by homeless people: First, which space do they use, and why; secondly, how homeless people perceive public space; and finally, whether they experience conflict in their use of public space.

Public space refers to all those areas to which everyone has direct and unrestricted access, and which are customarily common property or part of the public domain. However, public space is not understood as a single entity, but rather as something with many different interpretations from both a legal and a cultural point of view. It can include areas as diverse as government administration buildings or the vestibule of an airport, from a public square to the virtual space through which we surf on the Internet. It is important to note that public space is not a uniform space, but can be differentiated. We follow Carmona et al. (2003) in distinguishing between ‘external public space’, ‘internal public space’ and ‘quasi-public space’. External public spaces are public squares, streets, parks, parking lots and the like. Internal public spaces are public institutions such as libraries and museums. Quasi-public spaces are places that are legally private but are a part of the public domain, such as shopping malls, campuses, sports grounds and in some countries privatised transport facilities. These quasi-public spaces are privately owned but places where everyone should have the right of entry, and to deny person admittance has to be explained or justified by the violation of specific rules or regulations. The primary focus of our research was on external public space. However, there is a significant development towards an increase in the number of quasi-public spaces, which has important implications for homeless people and these are also considered. Every square foot of land in our cities is being used commercially or productively and public spaces nowadays are more the exception than the rule. Indeed, even in public space, it is easy to see how many of its more traditionally characteristic elements have been taken over, managed and regulated by privately-owned companies (such as security companies, sub-contractors in charge of cleaning the parks and public gardens, social services out-sourced to companies by town councils, etc.).

The target group of this research was homeless people who spent most of their day in public spaces, people who have no home of their own, sleep rough or possibly use night shelters. These are also people dependent on various emergency services. According to the European ETHOS typology (Meert et al., 2004) they belong to the ‘roofless’ category. They are in a situation of triple exclusion – social (no private or safe place for social relations), legal (having no legal title to a space or exclusive possession) and physical (having no abode). In addition to roofless people, we also interviewed people who according to the European ETHOS-typology belong to the ‘houseless’ category, that is people with inadequate housing. The latter group includes mainly squatters, illegal occupants of a building. Public space was particularly important for all our interviewees; however, their use of public space and their relationship to it differed.
Public order and changes in access to public space

Our starting point is the hypothesis of Neil Smith (1996, 2002) who designates with the concept of a ‘revanchist city’ the disciplining and security reaction of the well-to-do gentrifiers, against the poor and the homeless. Revanchist interventions in the city appear to be reclaiming public spaces for those groups who possess economic value as producers or consumers to the virtual exclusion of the poor and powerless (MacLeod, 2002). There is a stronger and stronger tendency toward private take-over of what was public. More and more there are private districts and estates, with restricted-access and a permanent security force to expel all those who have not been specifically invited in. When the credentials to enter many places, that up until very recently were public, open and free, have become more demanding and arbitrary, it becomes more and more important to demand a clear, safe statute of access. Low and Smith (2006) argue that the control of public space is a central strategy of neoliberalism. This seems quite clear when we analyse certain projects for urban renewal, where the relocating and removing of people who are homeless and the services which they use seem to be becoming the norm. This can only be understood as part of a policy of ownership which requires a change in the use of the surrounding public spaces in order to push up capital value in a real estate market which is enormously sensitive to aesthetic and environmental appearances.

In the European context, we have, however, to deal critically with the notion of a revanchist city. In Belgium for instance, the act that prohibited vagrancy was abolished in 1993. Until that time, the Belgian policy towards homeless people was characterised by anti-urbanism and repression. The new law of 1993 (which mentioned ‘homelessness’ for the first time), states that homeless people should no longer be punished and should now be treated in special reception centres, which should prepare them for reintegration in society. Similarly, in France begging and vagrancy prohibition disappeared from the penal code in 1994. Concerning the topic of begging, a variety of rules across Europe can be observed. In Norway for instance, begging has been formally legalised since January 2006, while in Slovenia, in contrast, begging is legally prohibited and in the recent past was punishable by imprisonment; today following 2006 legislation a fine can be imposed for ‘begging for money or other material goods in an intrusive or offensive way or sleeping in public places that are not intended for this purpose and where this is causing problems for someone’ (articles 9 & 10 of APPOP). Though in many countries the punitive laws on begging have been weakened and the emphasis is now on reintegration into society, the control of homeless people and beggars has nevertheless increased enormously in quasi-public spaces. In France for instance, even though begging no longer figures in the penal code, it is still forbidden to beg in the railway stations and on trains. Also
In other countries (for Germany see Busch-Geertsema, 2006 and Chapter 2, this book) where the public transport and public transport facilities are being (partly) privatised, we notice the introduction of controls on the use of quasi-public places.

In terms of the controls on access to public space a similar European trend is evident. In Spain, for example, a very explicit transformation of public space has taken place. At the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, coinciding with the transition from dictatorship to democracy, the streets were reclaimed by the citizens. In every district, every demonstration, every social or sports event provided an opportunity to make up for lost time. In the 1990s another type of gathering in public space began to take place. The phenomenon known as the ‘big bottle’ brought hundreds or even thousands of young people outdoors to meet and drink alcohol. This behaviour, however, awoke suspicion, apprehension, fear and even aggression on the part of the average citizen. Along with the ‘big bottle’, another new use of public space is the so-called ‘blanket hits’ which refers to the rise in pavement selling by a myriad of sellers of illegal copies of music, imitation bags, etc. The social visibility of this phenomenon has been increased by the fact that in many cases the people who try to earn their living in this way are undocumented immigrants. These two new phenomena have entered into the public space in large Spanish cities, traditionally occupied by other types of people: street prostitutes, drug dealers and homeless people. These phenomena have produced a breeding ground for all kinds of personal and collective paranoia.

Private, closed spaces have appeared everywhere, fenced off and designed to isolate and impede the passage or permanent presence of those who have been defined as adversaries, real or symbolic enemies (see Davis, 2001). An enormous effort in design, aimed at driving away the undesirables, can be seen in the architecture, urban furniture or sign-posting. Anti-homeless benches, gates and fences, apparently innocent decorative elements, are spreading all over the city.

Luxembourg City has experienced a sharp rise in immigration. This is one of the structural changes brought about in the Grand Duchy by the decline of the iron and steel industry and the establishment of a financial market, with 162 financial institutions in 2004. The development of the economy’s service sector, as well as the growing number of banks and European institutions, has reshaped the population mix. The now numerous affluent groups are concentrated in the upper city centre, but are also gradually spreading to the outer districts. Smith (1996, p.88) argues that gentrification forms part of a general process of redevelopment driven by the restoration of profit margins. Property prices (or the prices of private space) are very high in Luxembourg City, putting ownership or tenancies of decent housing in Luxembourg City (and elsewhere in the country) almost beyond the reach of low-income groups. The presence of affluent foreign communities in Luxembourg attracts hordes of
developers looking to maximize profit margins. The Pétrusse Valley, for example, situated in the centre of Luxembourg City, is often cited as a refuge by homeless people, but is also appreciated by other groups for entirely different reasons:

*We are developing a luxury city-centre residential complex that will be the beginning of a new very large-scale urban development… With an absolutely unparalleled and exceptional view of the Pétrusse Valley, it is a prime location for mixed housing, property, or office developments. The X Group will be building two five- and four-star hotels with a combined total of 280 rooms (Vandermeir, 2005).*

The changes in public space and the increased visibility of homeless people led to the Luxembourg City squats being shut down in winter 2002-2003, after which a process was initiated to decentralise homeless services into other municipalities around the country.

**Methodology**

*Semi-structured interviews with homeless people*

The approach in the present report is based around a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. In each country, homeless people were interviewed using a common questionnaire. In general, the interviews were not strongly structured to begin with and were therefore initially regarded as narratives: conversations in which people pass on experiences, feelings, opinions and anecdotes relating to the public space and to the places they use to organise their daily life. The questionnaire included topics about the use of public space by homeless people (where do they sleep, beg, socialise, find food and beverage; which places are used for personal hygiene); homeless people's perceptions of public space (where they feel at home, dignity issues…); and finally also the conflicts in the use of public space (conflicts with the police, security guards, other users of public space,…). Asking questions about the daily organisation of someone’s life or the places where someone feels at home demands time and mutual respect. It was not always easy to discuss every specific topic with the interviewees, because of mistrust or a lack of time. People also want to present themselves to best effect, and it was not always possible to detect if someone was telling the truth. In some cases, it was also difficult to introduce the conflicts in public space into the conversation, since in many cases the interviewee began by denying having experience of conflictual situations as a way of defending him/herself from being identified as a conflictual or problematic person. Nevertheless, as the interview went on, stories about experiences appeared which showed the tension and violence that living outdoors entailed. The selection of the respondents was carried out to include men and women, younger and older people, and representatives of ethnic and other minority groups.
Fieldwork in eight European countries (the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, Hungary, Norway and Belgium) provides the empirical evidence for our study. In total, we performed 64 in-depth interviews with people who are homeless. Besides, we also included results from each country relevant existing research. In addition, observation, executed during the fieldwork, could be integrated in the analysis. In order to profile the homeless people, we could only rely on the profiles of the 64 interviewed persons and on some quantitative data obtained from the other pieces of research. Although we focussed on men as well as women, it turned out to be more difficult to interview women who are roofless. The same conclusion can be made for young persons. We could only interview 2 persons younger than 25 years. Norwegian employees from outreach services state that young people more often spend the night or day with friends or acquaintances than go to the social services. In contrast, the Czech winter emergency project demonstrates that a disturbingly high percentage of young people spend the night in one of the shelters. During the interviews, not many indications were found about the increase or decrease of foreigners among the homeless population (see Table 1).

### Table 1: Study Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Semi-structured interviews</th>
<th>Location of the semi-structured interviews</th>
<th>Additional research sources</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prague and surrounding</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Luxembourg-ville</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Budapest + countryside</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Madrid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ljubljana(11)/Maribor(4)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Carried out</td>
</tr>
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<td>Oslo</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
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</table>

### Profiles of the interviewed homeless people

**Gender**

Because of gender differences in the use, perceptions and possible conflicts in public space, we tried to interview both men and women (Table 2). Notwithstanding this intention, it turned out to be more difficult to interview women who are roofless. In three countries (Hungary, France and Slovenia) all respondents were male. In Norway, we interviewed only one woman, in Luxembourg and the Czech Republic we contacted two women and in Spain and Belgium three of the interviewees were
female. In the case of the Czech Republic the female respondents were both squatters living with a male companion. They were both living in a wood with low buildings, unfinished for several decades and quite derelict. One woman was living with her husband in a tent in front of the buildings, while the other woman was living in the derelict brick building with her boyfriend. This strategy of finding a partner so as not to be alone on the street is also recognizable in other studies. On Sunday 29 January 2006, a statistical survey was carried out in the Winter Emergency Centre Letna (the Czech Republic) between 8 and 9 pm. At the time of the survey, 227 persons were present in the centre, of whom 21 were women (9%). Most of these women were accompanied by a male partner. Single women only used the tents sporadically. In the beginning, one tent was reserved only for women but this seemed to be unnecessary. The women refused to be separated from their partners and wanted to spend the night in the same tent as their partner. Other studies also emphasize the greater visibility of roofless men. Czech research carried out in the Prague 11 district and the Prague 5 district for instance, identified a total 531 roofless persons; only 56 of them were female. They also visited eight squats were they approached 134 persons (including 22 women). In the report profiling the users of emergency services, Meert et al. (2005), describe the predominance of men in the shelters (approximately 90% of the users of emergency shelters were men). The female respondent in Norway didn’t like the hostels either. She said that it is too difficult to adjust to the rules, but above all she was not allowed to stay there with her boyfriend.

**Table 2: Gender profile of interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Slovenia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age structure**

Table 3 shows the age structure of the interviewees in the eight different countries. Only 2 persons are younger than 25 years, 21 respondents have an age between 25 and 45 and 36 persons are older than 45. The age of 5 persons was indeterminable. In 7 countries we did not interview any roofless person younger than 25.
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

Table 3: Age structure of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>25-45</th>
<th>45+</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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Nationality

43 of the 52 interviewed persons have the nationality of the country they are living in. Only 9 interviewed respondents (Table 4) have another nationality (mainly from Eastern Europe). The Czech research for the Prague 11 district shows that 11 (of the 49 roofless persons) do not have Czech citizenship, but are construction workers mainly from Slovakia and Ukraine. One of the interviewed persons, a Romany man, from East Slovakia is also a construction worker. He was staying in workmen’s hostels provided by the employers. The day he lost his job, he also lost his accommodation. A statistical survey, carried out in the winter emergency centre, showed that 33% of the accommodated persons came from Prague, 48% came from other regions of the Czech Republic, while 19% were foreigners (Slovakia, Lithuania and Ukraine).

Table 4: Nationality of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Non-Foreign</th>
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<td>1: Morocco</td>
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<td>1: Former Yugoslavia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>64</td>
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Specific characteristics

Indicating certain specific characteristics of the interviewed persons (such as drug use) is essential because of the significant extent to which these characteristics can determine behaviour and thus shape the use of public space and the possible conflicts which can occur. In Norway, the homeless services are for the most part organised in order to receive drug addicts. The public debate is mainly structured around the theme of begging and around the visibility of drug users in the city centre. Five of the six interviewed Norwegian persons frequently used drugs. Besides this drug addiction, two persons also had an alcohol abuse problem; and two persons were on a drug rehabilitation programme (methadone). In the Czech Republic one person had a stroke 2 years ago and is blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. He receives a partial invalidity pension of 3000 CZK a month. Another Czech man was being treated for venous ulceration. A woman living in a tent with her husband was employed, but for half a year she has been sick with an incurable disease. None of the interviewed persons were addicted to drugs or alcohol. In Spain, two of the seven persons interviewed were addicted to drugs. One of these two drugs addicts tries to obtain money by means of prostitution. The other drug user had a mental illness. Two further persons were addicted to alcohol and one person had a mental illness. In Belgium, two of the interviewed persons had a history of drug use, but were clean at the time of interview. For the other countries (France, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Hungary) we could not determine specific characteristics of those interviewed.

Rooflessness and the use of public space

Basic needs of homeless people

Delgado (2004) states that public space is in reality in a permanent state of emergence, it is an event: a place which is not a place, but rather a ‘take place’. It is a pure happening, whereby public space is that which only exists when it is used’, when it is passed through’. Homeless people, who are by definition houseless and transient, are clearly part of that public space, in the places they occupy and establish themselves at different times of the day and for different activities. Street life is structured around specific places and homeless people develop a range of strategies in public spaces to take ownership of that space for private, economic, professional and social purposes. In other words, they have different territories which are occupied not at random, but specifically by the time of day.

Two basic profiles of users of public space can be identified: (i) the autonomous homeless and (ii) the drifting homeless. These occupy the endpoints of the continuum, with various stages and types of transition in between.
Autonomous homeless people try to transform the public space into some kind of home. They build a shack, might have a bed to sleep on and a makeshift stove for heating and even run a household. Such people usually live in groups and often have dogs for company and protection. In a way, they are the outsiders of the homeless population. They refuse to be institutionalised, but often form relationships with local residents. They are characterised by conscious choices and the desire for progress and development, and often settle down in deserted houses, abandoned factories etc., where they tend to remain for years, or until such time as their habitat is destroyed by urban development or closure.

Drifting homeless people have no permanent place. They sleep wherever dusk finds them, often on the bare pavement. Even if they have a regular place of their own, it is not more than some kind of roof over their heads. They do not shape or develop their surroundings. Total resignation, detachment from the self, depression and psychological disorders are frequent. Outside circumstances and pressure make them move to another street, apartment block entrance, underpass or hideout.

The interviewed persons for this study belong somewhere along the continuum between these two extreme points. We must take this into consideration when analysing the public spaces that are used for the daily activities of homeless people. For the purposes of the analysis, we will look at public space according to the activities it is used for; sleeping, eating, personal hygiene, begging and socialising.

**Sleeping**

In most countries (we found some explicit citations in the interviews in Norway, Slovenia and Hungary) the weather (especially in winter) was one of the most important criteria in finding a place to sleep. A higher proportion of rough sleepers choose to take refuge at night shelters or emergency shelters during the coldest winter months. However, large numbers stay in the streets and invent clever tricks to survive the low temperatures. In Hungary for instance, a few years ago, a team of social workers was shocked to see a group of homeless men lying on the pavement in front of a busy railway station. It soon turned out that some underground utilities network operated by the railway makes a ‘hot line’ on the pavement, reaching temperatures of 20-25 degrees. They also came across a man who had put up a tent over the ventilation shaft of an industrial plant. He was wearing only underwear even on the coldest winter days. In Norway, construction sites, as they are warmed up to preserve the materials, are frequently used as a place to sleep.

Other heated places, like staircases, underground stations, railway stations or waiting rooms are also frequently used as a place to sleep. Most of these places are not external public spaces (as defined by Carmona, 2003), but have well-defined and unambiguous functions and purposes. Consequently, conflicts are frequent in
those areas. Besides the weather criteria, invisibility is another important criterion in finding a place to sleep. In Slovenia for instance the police do not bother homeless people if they are not seen by passers-by:

*Police mostly persecute us in visible places. If it is not visible, they know (about us) and they leave us alone. (homeless person, Slovenia)*

As indicated above, the situations of homeless people vary a great deal. Persons who can be considered as autonomous homeless often have a ‘permanent’ sleeping place. As Razpotnik and Dekleva (2005) noted, these homeless people have certain places, which they call their base. This base is a term for a hidden place, where they sleep. In the case of the Czech Republic three of the interviewed persons were in this situation. Two of the interviewed persons were living in tents; the third person was living in a derelict unfinished building. The place was arranged as a small flat and was divided with furniture into a kitchen and room, which served as a bedroom and living room. In the Norwegian capital Oslo, one of the interviewees said that some homeless people might stay for periods in the woodlands surrounding the city. Some of them set up temporary shelters. The woodlands are partly privately owned and partly owned by the municipality. Containers by the seafront are used from time to time as well by squatters. Many squats have been shut down in Luxembourg, but those that remain are still key sleeping locations. Some homeless people have effectively taken ‘ownership’ of their squats, turning them into a space of domesticity, as this ethnographic account of a visit into the inner sanctums of homeless people in France (Paris) shows:

*Swelling with pride at our visible astonishment, Louis led us under the bridge to show us the huts they had each built for themselves (…) Under the bridge, we found five shanties hand-built by Louis and his neighbours stretching along the embankment, nestling in the shelter provided by the arch. Louis described them as “bachelor pads”, as well he might. Three of the five huts were completely finished, the fourth, Louis said, still needed “some doing up inside”, the fifth was still unfinished, missing its door. (…) He opened up one of the huts to reveal a tiny living room with a bed, walls covered with wooden battens neatly bonded together, fitted carpets, a little gas cooker at the entrance, a table with four chairs and a clothes cupboard. Each of these dwelling places bears the imprint of its occupants: Louis’ hut has a bed-spread embroidered for him by Christelle (…) We moved on to the third bed-sit, which belonged to François. The bed was unmade, and plates were strewn around the floor. Louis was quick to apologise: I keep telling him that you have to put stuff away, keep it tidy; us street people can’t let things slide, you have to be strict with yourself. It’s what keeps you on your guard, but François knows that and always tidies up. A bit late in the day, but that’s not too bad, it’s not like we’re in an army camp here. (…) We continued*
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

this “guided tour of the property”, and it came to me what a paradox this was, these so-called homeless men who invest so much of themselves in these essentially pass-through spaces through these objects. These are the link to their life, the ordinary life of an ordinary person (extracted from Girola, 2006)

The drifting homeless have no permanent place to sleep. Finding a place to sleep is more often a solitary task, although they sometime aid each other in finding an appropriate place. For those homeless there seems to be an ad hoc mode of finding a place to sleep. When comparing the indicated places in the different countries, there are a lot of similarities. In France, the INSEE (the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research, see Bush et al., 2002) questioned habitual shelter and hot meal distribution service users in January 2001. The survey found that 8% of respondents were sleeping in a location not meant for human habitation. Half were occupying a private place (hut, factory, car, stairwell) – in one of three cases with the owner’s knowledge – and half were sleeping in either closed-in (underground or mainline station, shopping centre) or open (street, public park) public spaces.

In Luxembourg, none of the interviewees slept at all unless they were lucky enough to secure a place in one of the night hostels:

_The odd nights when I didn’t have a bed, I’d just trudge around the place; I’d go walking at night, and during the day I’d take trains, doing round trips and sleeping on the train… (homeless person, Luxembourg)_

But a number of interviewees mentioned places where roofless people can spend the night. One well-known one is the marshalling yard where railway carriages are readied for use the next day. We checked these out on our field inspection with the police. They were not locked; the interiors were clean and warm. The police said this was a favourite spot for homeless people to sleep, as were some building sites. One interviewee also recounted his experience. The Pétrusse Valley which divides Luxembourg City into the upper town (with the Place d’Armes and pedestrian precinct) and lower town (the railway station and Bonnevoie districts) also offers places under bridges and behind undergrowth, as well as benches in open spaces for a lie-down. Car parks, bridges, blockhouses and Luxembourg City Park are other places where roofless people can sometimes be found sleeping. But these are gender-specific. It is obviously much more dangerous for a woman to sleep in a park at night than for a man. The police told us two ways in which homeless people find a space to spend the night, both of which are also confirmed by homeless people themselves. One is to ring all the doorbells on a block of flats until someone buzzes the door open, and then to go and sleep in the cellars. Obviously, this runs the risk of an occupier finding them and calling the police. The other is shopping arcades, used for drug-taking and drinking, or simply as somewhere to sleep.
In the Czech Republic, two of the interviewed men did not have a stable place for spending their nights. They used benches and trams when they felt sleepy. One woman with her husband also experienced spending nights on trams, particularly in wintertime. One man had been sleeping in a wrecked car for an extended period of time. A part of the Prague 5 city District-project includes a questionnaire survey (50 respondents). When asked about their living place, the respondents replied as follows: in a squat (40%), in deserted structures not designed for accommodation such as sheds or garages (22%), outside in a tent or under a bridge (26%), on public transport (14%), in organisations (12%) or at friends or acquaintances (8%). The Prague Homeless Census (2004) showed that 24% the recorded homeless people spent the night in the accommodation facilities of social services although the capacity of those was almost 100% full. In addition, a further 13% spent the freezing night on chairs or floors in day centres. The remaining approximately 63% of the homeless people did not even have a theoretical chance to use a legal shelter from the freezing weather.

In Slovenia, the following locations were cited as places to sleep: public toilets (at the railway station), waiting rooms at the bus station, parking lots, doorways, basements, parks, under the bridges, railway carriages, abandoned buildings, passages and garages. As a consequence of the weather circumstances, rough sleeping is quite hard in Norway. As already discussed, a good place to sleep is a place where there is some heating.

When looking at the places where roofless people sleep, we notice that a remarkable share of the respondents did not use night shelters to spend the night. The question arises: why spend the night on the streets when there are night shelters? There are several possible reasons why: lack of spare beds, overly-restrictive hostel admission conditions, a hostile atmosphere, arguments with other roofless people or shelter staff, having to share a room with others, exclusion from a shelter, a show of solidarity with an excluded friend, or simply a desire to remain independent. Weather often plays a big part: people are obviously more ready to sleep in a squat or on the street in summer than in winter.

Because of the different approach in Belgium, all interviewed persons had a fixed place to sleep, although they had been living rough for many years. Four of the interviewees were living in a temporary homeless hostel, four were living in a group in a sort of supported accommodation and four were living on their own.

However, the available number of public sleeping places depends sometimes on the attitude of the local community. Residents and authorities generally accept the presence of squatters and roofless persons in particular areas (such as deserted areas, abandoned factories or wastelands), whereas they are hardly tolerated in the inner cities, busy junctions and business districts. In addition to external pressures
and limitations, choices of a place to sleep are also influenced by individual or group characteristics, such as lifestyle, livelihood, health, level of socialisation, attitude (exhibitionist, rebel), addiction or the proximity of previous residence.

**Begging**

While good places to sleep are defined by criteria such as a heat and safety, the places to spend the day are rather defined by the need for an income. Homeless people have different sources of income, such as unemployment benefits, disability benefits, (occasional) jobs, collecting scrap metal etc… Furthermore, for a number of people begging is still an important survival strategy.

Some homeless only beg occasionally, in order to get some minimal sum that they need for food or cigarettes. For others begging is the main source of income and they also beg for large parts of the day so that is almost a 24 hour a day job. The money they receive from begging is mainly used for buying drugs or alcohol. Their daily routine is entirely built up around the question of how to get money. In Norway, the City Mission project revealed that 95 percent of the interviewed persons needed money to buy illegal drugs. One of the interviewed Norwegian drug users earns his money in different ways. For example, he assists other drug users with their injections. Besides that, he collects bottles and sells things that he finds. The main spots for begging are located in the city centre. These are also the places where it is possible to buy drugs. In Hungary, the underpasses are very attractive for people who are homeless, not only because they are a good place for buying drugs, but also because of the serious black market business that is present: goods are on sale, drugs are available, prostitution is present. Homeless people act as a kind of watch-guard by giving a signal when the security guards are arriving. In return, they receive food, beverages, money, drugs and security.

The locations where begging is done vary with time, place, public transport passenger and pedestrian flows. Living from begging involves mastering a set of arguments, practices, attitudes, postures, schedules, places and rules, which demand real skills. To maximize his return, the beggar must evaluate the most profitable locations and times, or the competition and law enforcement he is apt to encounter on a site. The carrying-on of economic activities is associated with certain places that act as working places which homeless people take ownership of through a specific space-time organisation. Some return regularly to the same places, because they have previously begged profitably there, because it is their patch.

In Slovenia, we noted that everybody has his own particular spot for begging. Also Razpotnik and Dekleva (2005) observed that homeless people selling the street paper often sold it at their standard begging location. With begging there is also a protocol involved, which has to be followed.
Every beggar has his own territory for begging and for a newcomer it is hard to get in... There are rules among them, that all are supposed to follow. These are: when you beg for money, you always say sorry and thank you, even if you don't get the money. Those that break this rule are excluded, if not in other ways, then physically (Street Journal Slovenia, 2005)

The most popular places to beg in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana and Maribor are in front of public buildings (like the court house), near the university faculties or in the most busy streets in the city centre. Besides the advantages, such as the higher concentration of people and the higher possibility of receiving money from passers-by, there are also two important disadvantages related to begging in the most popular places. The first problem is the high concentration of beggars, who have their own territory. Because of this some homeless people avoid these places for begging and find some other spots away from the narrow city centre. The second problem is institutional in that begging is prohibited by law. In the past this was punished by imprisonment up to 60 days (Law on offence against public order and peace, 2003). According to the new law, which has been adopted in June 2006, there is a fine for the person found begging or sleeping in public places.

In Oslo, beggars spend much of the day within the rectangle that marks the core of the city centre. The main road, especially a particularly busy space around the middle of the street and a space around the west end of the street are used most frequently for begging. Some persons sell the street paper ‘=Oslo’ at the same spot as where they are begging. One of the interviewee had his own spot, which he guarded carefully. He was the only one of the interviewees that begged regularly and who had begging as a main source of income.

In the Czech Republic, two of the interviewed persons admit that they sometimes beg. A 46-year old man that has been without accommodation for 16 years always begged in a church on Sundays. The woman who was living in a tent in the allotment garden with her husband once begged in the Old Town Square. In a whole day, she made only 70 CZK (less than 2.50 €) and she felt very bad while begging. The other interviewed people had never begged in their entire lives. Two men claimed they would be too ashamed to go begging and a further two men made money by collecting scrap metal for recycling.

In Hungary as well as in other countries, busy urban junctions, such as underpasses, main roads, shopping streets, shopping centres and markets provide numerous possibilities for subsistence. Besides the possibility of begging, there are several regular and occasional jobs to be done. A 32-year old man, who moved from the countryside to Budapest, slept in a shed near a market, keeping an eye on the goods. In Luxembourg engaged anecdotal evidence indicates that begging is not a common practice but it does occur it is mainly done in Avenue de la Gare,
which runs between the railway station and upper town where the pedestrian precinct is located. Other begging sites mentioned are the Cathedral Square in the upper town, outside supermarkets, and the street where a McDonald’s restaurant is situated. Another practice is to go up to people sitting at café tables on the Place d’Armes in the centre of the upper town next to the pedestrian precinct and tourist centre of Luxembourg City.

The best places for begging in France are outside food and other shops (pharmacies), cafés, restaurants, banks, post offices, cinemas, churches, phone boxes, underground and RER (Paris-suburbs rapid transit train) station exits. One interviewee (Emmanuel) begs at Alésia underground station on the steps leading down to the platform. He earned € 20 in three hours on this spot, compared to an average € 6 for a full day above ground. This enabled him to buy a night’s stay in a bed-and-breakfast hotel close to rue d’Alésia.

The INSEE survey\(^2\) found that 39.1% of beggars begged almost daily (occasional or regular), mainly outside shops (20.8%), and in the street (27.7%). Only 7.5% beg in underground stations and 8.2% in mainline stations. To qualify that, however, the survey was done in urban centres with populations over 20 000, and not just in the Paris.

Just over half the beggars questioned by INSEE (54%) received their income from regular givers. It is interesting to note that certain places seem to be more conducive to the presence of regular givers. Beggars outside shops and shopping centres, in underground stations and outside churches more often get money from people they know and see regularly. The street, being a more impersonal place of transit and passage, appears not to enable such familiarity with regular givers to develop. So beggars’ presence in certain places may arguably reflect a strategy of customer loyalty development.

**Eating**

The obvious difficulty of finding shelter or accommodation is compounded for many homeless people by that of finding something to eat. The main food providers for homeless people are the homeless services. They are very widely used by people who are homeless. In addition to this, they buy food for themselves, mainly from the money that they get by begging. The autonomous homeless often have their own improvised kitchen. The people interviewed in the Czech Republic for instance, prepare their food on wood burners, made from barrels. The interviewed people in the allotment garden area use a wood-heater outside under the trees.

\(^2\) INSEE survey was conducted in 2001 in shelter and hot meal service users; over 4000 respondents took part
In the Czech Republic, homeless people can come for meals to the day centre on weekdays. During the weekend they have to buy their own food, but if they have no money, they go hungry. One of the interviewed persons admitted that he sometimes goes hungry for several days. Another man admitted that he sometimes steals pizza from a garden restaurant (from a plate of a guest who is not at his table at that time). The Emmaüs BVA survey done in Paris confirms that some homeless people have only one meal a day. It reports that finding nourishment can be a problem that particularly affects homeless people aged 18-29 (51%), those who have been rough-sleeping for 5 years and over (51%) and those accommodated in homeless shelters (49%). Slightly fewer of the interviewees living in specialized homeless hostels and social security bed-and-breakfast hotels had gone hungry (30%). In Luxembourg, we asked our interviewees what they would do if for some reason they could not use the services available. Some cafés give homeless people the day’s leftovers and some specialty businesses and shopkeepers do the same. One baker opposite the main railway station always hands out the previous day’s croissants when he arrives each morning, while the station buffet sometimes distributes leftover sandwiches at night. A butcher also sometimes gives away fresh sausages or cooked meats. The Bonnevoie priest gives a euro every day to anyone who comes to his door. Also in the Brussels neighbourhood, Les Marolles, traditional shop- and barkeepers consider solidarity with the poor as one of their duties. All the interviewed traditional shop-and barkeepers gave direct support (food and even money) to homeless people. However, their solidarity is only conditional. Support is clearly reduced, if not refused, to foreigners and to homeless people who abuse alcohol.

Looking for food in the dustbins is the last resort for many homeless people:

Looking for food in the dumpsters… well sometimes also that happens, but mainly I prefer to wait so that I get some money and then I go in the store to buy food. (Slovenia, int 3)

One of the interviewed men in the Czech Republic also admitted that when he has no food he searches for food in dustbins. One of the other respondents replied with a definite ‘no way’. Also one of the Slovenian respondents indicates that he would rather not eat than go looking into the dustbins.

**Personal hygiene**

As well as housing, food and money, another big concern of homeless people is keeping clean. In addition to being the main food providers, the services for homeless people are also the places most people use for their personal hygiene. Some of the informants in Norway state that places like the Salvation Army day centre make it easier to maintain a decent appearance. If these places are unavailable or if people who are homeless have no access to them, they have to improvise. In Norway for
instance, a woman who was interviewed uses filling station toilets to take care of her personal hygiene. In Slovenia, those interviewed replied that the settings used for personal hygiene can either be outdoors (rainwater or river), or in private bars and pubs, public toilets (for which there is a charge) or in specific organisations.

*Well, I washed in Drava river. In Drava we washed also in some public toilets... later we went to Karitas and started to change our clothes a little. (Homeless person, Slovenia)*

Private bars are a more difficult option, as the owners or bartenders do not like to let homeless people in. In the Czech Republic, the men interviewed in the day centre defecate in toilets in shopping centres (which are free of charge, in contrast with public toilets in the city, the metro or train stations). Sometimes they also go in pubs or urinate outdoors. This very basic form of hygiene care is linked to improvised settings. The people interviewed in the squats wash themselves in their living quarters, bringing water by hand or by means of transport in containers (two of them from a graveyard 1.5 kilometres away, one from a pond). They have bathtubs for baths, which they also use to wash their clothes. One couple regularly used a sauna when they have money. In France, 67% of the residents interviewed for the Emmaüs BVA survey said it was important to preserve a good self-image. Similar results were also obtained in Slovenia. Neglect of hygiene does not seem to be common among the interviewed persons in Slovenia. But fulfilling daily personal needs and calls of nature is not easy for street people. The French BVA survey asked homeless people where they go to the toilet. The finding was that 27% use public toilets (coin-operated “Superloos”), 46% go in homeless shelters, and 41% in cafés. Apart from that, there are only off-street recesses and doorways. Paris City Council negotiated with the management company for free access to “Superloos” sited near soup kitchens, as being essential to preserve hygiene, dignity and cleanliness for the poor. This has made 1414 “Superloos” and 24 lavatories accessible free of charge since 1 November 2004. Approximately 95 public parks have toilets in them, which are accessible during park opening hours. There are now free toilets at approximately 130 sites in Paris. There are various places where homeless people can wash themselves. One French interviewee was able to treat himself to a B&B hotel room when he had a very good day’s begging. Using a public swimming bath’s washing facilities costs 4 euros. Three interviewees went to the local Turkish baths, swimming baths or NGO-run facilities to wash and keep clean. They also considered these places to be much more hygienic than the homeless hostels which, they claim, are infested with lice and crabs.
Socialising

Public places are also gathering points. The main criteria for socialising seem to be, according to the analysed interviews, having a place to sit comfortably and being in a populated area. ‘Working places’ are also the main spots for keeping up connections with passers-by and potential givers. Robert (France), for example, believes that his constant presence at Saint Germain en Laye station makes him ‘part of the landscape’, so the people who see him day after day are more inclined to help him. He has several regulars who slip him a few coins every day. An interesting development in the patterns of socialising of the homeless is the introduction of the mobile phones. Mobile phones are quite common among homeless (they use them to contact family or friends), but not all the informants had one. They inform each other on a variety of news (for example what is for dinner in the homeless shelter).

In Slovenia, parks with benches and the town square in the city centre are the spots where the homeless like to rest, drink together and just hang around. For those staying in the homeless shelter this is often the main place for socialising. Some of the interviewed homeless regularly spent all day at these locations. In Luxembourg city, the three-day shelters are also focal points for gathering and resourcing. Other meeting places cited in the interviews are Place de Bonnevoie near the “Ulysse” night shelter, the railway station main entrance, Place d’Armes (town centre), Pétrusse Valley and Avenue de la Gare (running between the railway station and the town centre). One interviewee (an undocumented immigrant) claimed to have no friends and so no specific place to meet anyone. The others gave no clear and precise answer to this question. The day centres in Oslo have become important places for socialising. They are among the few places roofless persons are left in peace.

The railway station: a melting pot of activities

A special word must be said about railway, underground and bus stations as being places that provide the homeless with opportunities that vary with their different functions. Julien Damon’s (1995) study of homeless people’s relationship to stations while working with the SNCF’s Mission Solidarité (France) is particularly informative. The railway station’s history, nature, working hours and urban location make it both a place of hiatus and service provision for users. For many homeless people, the station is a place for resource gathering, but alongside that, the station is also a space for waiting, resting, meeting and living for homeless people. A fair part of the day and night can be spent in a station engaging in a wide range of activities. The high the passenger throughput and exchanges the profitable stations are in comparison with parks, the street, and even a church square. Apart from the income-generating aspect, living in a station allows its services or opportunities to be used as stopgap replacements for life in a private space – eating, showering, and storing possessions in left-luggage lockers, as well as social intercourse. As a
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

meeting space, stations allow homeless people to merge with the crowd or engage in face-to-face encounters especially with other homeless people. It is a place where everyone knows everyone at least by sight and where relationships can be formed. More than meetings and endless discussions with fellow homeless, stations provide opportunities for many interactions with station workers, police, train operators, passengers and other members of the public. But this place is also where homeless people and beggars are increasingly least welcome.

The way that homeless people perceive public space

In this section we try to analyse how people who are homeless perceive public space and whether they distinguish any place as close to the meaning of ‘home’. The meaning of home is multidimensional and it is linked with different elements that are inherent to a home, such as security, family tradition, memories and family relations (Dupis and Thorns, 1996). There is nothing axiomatic about domestic space. It is a complex, largely idealised construct. It denotes belongingness to a controlled and domesticated place. Domestic space is the space where human beings settle, the place that makes sense to them, the sanctum with which they enter into a covenant of belonging (Zeneidi-Henry, 2002). For many homeless people, public space is the only place that they can call home. For homeless people, in fact, public space is a specific place in which the private is externalised, and the public internalized, a personal, innermost place. Their presence takes from a public place the possibility of distinguishing between private and public life, personal privacy and visibility. Being in a public place entails total exposure. Homeless people are present in and define themselves as belonging to public space. They are the incarnation of a particular aspect of that space, which defines them as a separate social group. The territories occupied by homeless people in public space may reflect effective personal organisation. Private spaces may be understood as located and organised within a ‘home’ territory which may well be selected by reference to symbolic criteria: it is a place which has emotional significance in the life of the now-homeless person (old neighbourhood, for example). These private places may be shared with other homeless people as a form of self-protection in self-serving strategies or in emotional alliances or occupied individually, which may require strategies to defend and protect the territory.

Occupying a public place as a private domain is not easily done. There is much anecdotal evidence of the problems encountered in occupying a place, becoming settled, living within the norms. To portray street life as an unfit life is to disregard the fact that homeless people can live on the street with dignity. Street life is not without regulation. Systems of mutual aid and solidarity can be seen, for example,
which protect individuals from extreme vulnerability. But this matter of dignity raises the issue of what the concept of ‘home’ means for homeless people. Is it possible to occupy a territory and feel at home in it?

Two kinds of private place can be distinguished. Some are visible, exposed to the public gaze: public bench, cardboard box on the pavement, underground station warm-air outlet. The organisation of space is less elaborate where the shelter is concealed, less exposed to weather hazards and the gaze of others. Concealed private spaces (like squats) more represent an intimate space that the person “owns” with or without a particular spatial organisation. It is safe to say that concealed private space is the space most “owned” by the individual because they feel safe in it: at home. But at the same time, it is also that which most needs defending. It must be borne in mind that street life is not a choice, and that the mere fact of feeling “at home” there and having grown used to a territory or having adapted to the hostile environment of public space does not mean that homeless people cannot aspire to something else.

In France, three interviewees were averse to using homeless hostels. They feel they stay cleaner on the street. Squats need to be seen as an aspiration to autonomy and a ‘home’, a space where self-affirmation is possible without constant reminders of one’s inferior status. As a result, the street and squats or the territory one has occupied may be preferred to shelter provision. There is then no irrationality in the choice: all the constraints imposed in hostels in terms of opening hours, hygiene, abstinence, etc., are experienced as condescending, not to say demeaning. The Emmaüs-BVA survey findings do not all square with these personal accounts. Contrary to popular myth, homeless people do prefer night shelters to rough sleeping, even if for a short time. 78% of respondents agreed, especially young people (81%), those in work (81%), and those who have been on the streets for less than a year (81%). That notwithstanding, 19% of respondents – especially the over-50s (76%) and those who have been on the streets for 5 years or more – would prefer to wait for longer-term accommodation before coming off the street.

The Luxembourg interviewees thought it was not possible to create a private place anywhere in public space. It must be stressed that while the number of interviews conducted did not enable this issue to be explored further, they did enable two (interlinked) general factors to be identified which structured the interviewees’ perception of public space: the security of places, and the presence of others. That notwithstanding, the presence of family may be a reason for avoiding certain places. So, a young man from Esch-sur-Alzette – Luxembourg’s second town with a population of only approximately 27,000 – did not want to use the local homeless services
for fear of running into a member of his family. There are also secret places, places where drug use and sleeping are possible in relative although not total safety. One group of young people regularly hangs around a derelict industrial site:

There are some places you can sleep alright because there’s people using other stuff as well, but there’s always that thought in the back of your mind that if somebody comes, you might have to be off. It’s the sort of thing that keeps people on edge, you’re never completely alright (homeless person, Luxembourg)

This aptly illustrates the difficulties in creating a private space, even a concealed one; there are no guarantees that it will not be ‘invaded’ by others. Public parks are also a mixed meeting place for homeless people. They are places where rest can be taken during the day, but they are also the stamping-ground of different marginal groups. Drugs may be hidden there, and being in the wrong place at the wrong time can create problems, not to mention syringes lying around, constituting a danger to those wanting to sit on the grass.

For the majority of the interviewed homeless people in Slovenia home is commonly associated with family members with whom they often do not have contact anymore. In their current situation, a feeling of home is mainly linked to safety, friends (among other people who are homeless), knowing the place and frequenting it often. The feeling of safety seemed to be the most important factor. Therefore, many homeless people stated that homeless centres are the closest thing to a home that they currently have. They also cited their territory for begging as a place where they feel at home. This is the place where they socialize with other homeless people and where they feel like a part of the neighbourhood. It seems that certain homeless people feel connected to the neighbourhood. Therefore the meaning of home is linked to the people and the territory where they are known. This is well illustrated in the following statement:

Everyone has their spot, their place. A person must be at his working place. If he isn’t, the neighbours come here (in the shelter) and ask for him. He was in the hospital a couple of times and people came to ask where he is, why is he in the hospital, how he is, in which hospital he is so that they would go visit him. When people get up in the morning, the first thing they do is open the window, open the shutters and check if he is there. If he is there, then the day is ok, if not, then something is wrong. He is there all the time, if it is minus 50, he is there. In winter, the neighbours bring him tea, sausages... He has to be there, he is like a clock or a monument. If he is not there then the whole building comes in here crying: ‘where is Ivo, where is Ivo?’ (homeless person, Slovenia)
In the Czech Republic, the three autonomous homeless ‘felt good’ at their living place. In all three cases the perception of home, of rest and privacy is also stronger because of personal relationships. The homeless people interviewed in the day centre did not feel at home anywhere. They did not have a place of rest; only one man who slept in a wrecked car experienced rest and privacy; in his car nobody bothers him. Still, he feels best in the day centre.

In Hungary, the most important factors that are considered when choosing a location are similar to other countries: safety, survival and subsistence, proximity of relevant offices, proximity of former residence, proximity of, or distance from other homeless people. A possible strategy to create a secure place to sleep is to hide far from everyone else. Although security is not the only reason for hiding: shame is an important factor as well. Homeless people are sometimes ashamed to such a degree that they hide in the most deserted, rundown areas. They usually do not like to transform their surroundings and make no attempt to clean or maintain the place:

   Leave me alone, I’m not going anywhere, I want to die here… (63-year-old sick man, staying under a bridge on the edge of town, unseen by all)

Autonomous homeless people try to enhance the security of their homes with the help of fences, by keeping dogs and by living in larger groups.

In Norway, two vital issues concerning the feeling of home need to be highlighted: routines versus break ups; and the need of safety versus invisibility. The first issue relates to living and organising the day and night by routine, versus constant break ups and the urge to move around. The second topic relates to the fact that being surrounded by people gives a feeling of protection. But those interviewed also expressed in different ways that they should not be too visible in public spaces. One respondent also highlighted the fact that he sometimes has an urgent need to be alone. Once, he locked himself into a public toilet and stayed there the whole day.

Conflicts in the use of public space

Urban public space is one of the battlegrounds where the interests, intentions and norms of passers-by and residents clash with those of people who are homeless, for whom public space is inevitably their private space as well. In this section we will analyse the conflicts that homeless people experience in their use of public space. We must keep in mind that for homeless people, these conflicts in open places and public spaces appear only at the end of a long and painful series of conflicts which have taken place in private space, in the home, in the family. So those who have been expelled, thrown out of their homes either by others, or fleeing themselves from unbearable conflicts, are the ones who, when they arrive at that ‘nothing-place’ which
is a park, a bench, an underground station or the entrance to a supermarket, find that they have to leave there too because they are not wanted. What they previously thought of as an obvious right (the street belongs to everyone, doesn’t it?) has become a source of difficulties (I can’t even stay out in the open). The significant development towards an increase in quasi-public spaces has important implications for homeless people. Many places (such as stores, public transport) have been taken over and managed by privately-owned companies. The right to stay there turns out to be particularly problematic. The first part of this section will therefore deal with the control of public space by the security services. Furthermore, we will deal with NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) reactions in some neighbourhoods; the adaptation of the urban furniture in order to control the presence of homeless people in public space, the psychological control of public space and the control of public space by other homeless people or other users. Unfortunately, conflicts in public space are not restricted to these different ways of managing public place. In some countries, some serious criminal incidents are reported.

The control of public space

The control of public space by security services

In all countries, homeless people are confronted with conflicts with security services. The presence of private security guards is not equal in every country. Furthermore there is a difference between the conflicts with police and the conflicts with private guards.

In Slovenia, the large majority of the homeless people interviewed reported little or no conflict with the police in external public spaces. Some even reported that the relations with the police have improved and that they had more conflicts in the past. If they had problems with the police, it was mainly because they were begging, they were making too much noise or they were in too large a group. Even in those cases, the police tried to avoid having conflicts with homeless people. They just ask them to move on, which simply results in a move to other police domains. It even seems that homeless people who spent a long time in a certain neighbourhood and became in a certain way part of it, have fewer problems with the police. They know them personally and they are frequently left alone:

They know me well here, so they let me be… they know me so well, that they gave up on me (on trying to make him leave his place in front of the cinema. (Slovenia, int. 8)
Homeless people with a less permanent location seem to have more problems. Two of the homeless people interviewed reported being beaten by the police when they were found sleeping in an external public place. Others mainly reported that their documents were checked. More problematic are the quasi-public spaces, such as bars, stores, shopping malls. There the homeless are an undesirable presence and frequently the police or security guards are called to remove them from the territory. In some cases, this removal was accompanied with violence:

They lock the train station… noon comes, and they open at 5 am;.. but I went down, into the toilet… I closed myself into the cubicle… some went into other cubicles… some slept on the floor. And than they came and beat us… the security guard… I was all beaten up… (Slovenia, int3).

In the case of Hungary a threefold division in the control of public space by security guards can be observed: the metro, the underpass and the street. The strictest rules apply at the lowest level, in the metro. This area belongs to the Budapest Public Transportation Company (BVK) and is publicly used privatised space (quasi public space). The Metro Security Service (metro police) oversees order and its duties include the exclusion and removal of unwanted people, as laid out in the terms of use of the metro:

Persons disturbing other passengers because of intoxication or dirty clothing can be excluded from using the metro.

This rule, formulated by the metro police, gives them the right to remove homeless people (with dirty clothes or intoxicated) from the metro whether or not they have a valid ticket or pass. A subjective judgment about someone’s appearance is sufficient for them to take action. The next level is the underpass. Observation, control and physical cleaning actions have resulted in the exclusion of certain groups from the underpass. This resulted in an almost complete expulsion of homeless people, though not as effectively as from the metro station itself. The policy of the local council outlines the following aim:

We will take back public areas, so that the residents of Budapest, tourists, old and young, families can use these areas to meet and relax. At the same time, the former users of the areas are offered alternatives suited to their needs: shelters and social services. (Local council, Budapest)

The alternation of the users implies the spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people from other citizens. At the uppermost level, in the streets, exclusion and segregation attempts are not so coordinated.
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman

We are only sent away from the underpass, nobody cares what we do out here. We can do anything outside, the police and public space patrols do not care. Why? Because that are the orders they got. When it is raining we can stay underground, but when it stops we must leave. (homeless person, Hungary)

This strict division between metro-underpass and the street is not the same for every homeless person. When the police get to know you, they sometimes leave you alone. Two of the interviewed persons, for instance, buy the metro security guards something to drink now and then, with the aim of being left alone in the metro.

In Spain, since the beginning of the millennium, public space has become a problematic, difficult and conflictive place resulting in a more severe approach. In Barcelona for instance, the local Catalan government has put into effect some municipal ordinances forbidding prostitution, aggressive begging and ‘bad citizenship’. At the same time, in the historic area of Madrid, there are districts imploring more policemen to control urban gangs. Because of the deterioration of some commercial areas of the city centre, some councillors asked that the police be given

a legal instrument that would allow them to temporarily move to shelters (even against their will) those beggars, prostitutes and drug addicts who have taken up living in public areas which are thus degraded and have stigmatized the environment (El País, 1st July 2006).

What appears to be an open, free space has its unspoken rules, can apparently easily be unknowingly broken. Homeless people are subjected to a kind of institutionalised violence by the police force: gestures which are apparently innocuous but which touch the limits of legality (for example asking people who are homeless for their identity papers over and over again as a kind of pressure to make the person leave). Good behaviour, clean clothes and a conventional use of public space seems to be the code which homeless people have to follow:

Since I was sleeping on a bench in the park there, in my district, well they called me (because they probably thought I was drunk or drugged or something) and I woke up and said “yeah?” “What are you doing here?” and I said, “... well nothing, resting a bit.” And of course I lied because they said: “Where do you live?” and I said: “Well, right near here, I said that I was waiting for my dad or some fib like that. Because I couldn’t tell them anything else, of course, they saw I wasn’t drunk or drugged or nothing. I was dressed OK. I always try, being out in the street and all, to dress as well as I can. You can see. (Antonio, Spain)

None of the interviewees told us of any case of police brutality; however beatings by security guards appear to be common. One of our interviewees had worked in the past as a private security guard and can now see, from the other side, what his previous behaviour had been like:
I know people that have had problems with security guards and the like. For instance, for not having any money and jumping the gate to the underground, people do that, and the guards catch him and instead of throwing him out, well they throw him out and hit him on the side of the head a couple of times. (Homeless person, Spain, former security guard)

In Norway the homeless people interviewed noted that when it comes to chasing people away, the private guards are the worst. The private guards are more aggressive, especially towards drug addicts. In Norway the visibility of drug users seems to be a theme of conflict. A group of veteran users of opiates had for some years settled in an open space named Plata near Oslo central railway station. The group, which had a core of older and exhausted drug addicts, was quite visible in the landscape. During spring 2004 a debate developed around the harm the group might be causing. The debate was fronted by the head of the Oslo Police Force and by politicians in the City Council. In early June 2004 the group at Plata was physically removed by the police force. The group settled just two blocs from Plata in a rather busy street. According to the security guards of Oslo S they observe very few homeless or drug users in and near the hall after the action against Plata. If the guards discover people who sleep at the station area, they are instructed to expel them.

In the case of the Czech Republic, the results of the Prague 5 District research illustrate the restrictive approach of public administration to the issue of homelessness. The municipal authorities of Prague 5 hired a security agency to guard the pedestrian zone around the Zlatý Andel shopping centre. Three security guards guarded the area of Andel non-stop from about the end of November until Christmas Eve. Nevertheless, this strategy did not seem to work. Immediately the security guards left alcoholics, homeless people and street vendors moved back to Andel. The mayor is now considering the possibility of hiring the security agency all-year round. When asked about possible conflicts with security services, the interviewees’ responses were negative at first then rather evasive. All respondents take good care of their appearance and were aware of the importance of their behaviour and clothing in order to avoid conflicts.

The Luxembourg police seem to be relatively tolerant of homeless people, and the odd problem that has arisen appears to be to do with the attitude of individual officers. Part of the reason for this is the context of Luxembourg, which cannot be compared with big cities like Paris. The closing-down of the squats in 2003 on safety grounds without doubt contributed to getting the situation in Luxembourg City under control. The opening of a night shelter for drug addicts near Luxembourg’s main railway station and more recently, a ‘dope room’ in the same building, as well as the opening of a night shelter and homeless services in Luxembourg’s second town as part of a process of decentralization have helped defuse the situation.
There has been a renewed crackdown on beggars in France since the mid-1990s. Their presence in some towns is seen as a public nuisance, threatening the image of tourist towns in summer, and sowing fear and insecurity among the public. Summer 1995 saw a resurgence of public debates on begging. From 1993, some mayors had brought in anti-begging ordinances, almost always limited to the summer season and specific parts of towns. In May 1995, La Rochelle town council, for example, put up notices in the town streets reading:

Don’t encourage begging. It can lead to drunkenness and aggressive behaviour on the public highway’. On 4 July1995, the mayor signed an Order outlawing ‘unauthorised importuning’ and prohibited ‘any person or animal from remaining for a prolonged time in one position, in particular lying down, thereby obstructing the free passage of pedestrians.

The Order was held to be illegal by the prefect for Charente-Maritime. The legality of these and similar regulations in other cities was widely debated in connection with the reform of the French Penal Code in March 1994, when begging and vagrancy ceased to be criminal offences. But as the testimony below dating from June2004, shows, homeless people in Bordeaux were still being persecuted:

If you stay on the pavement, they’ll stop and search you, tell you to move on, down to the banks of the Garonne between the Pierre and Saint-Jean bridges where it’s really grotty. Because Bordeaux’s a tourist town. So they ‘clean it up’ in June, same as every year. From May to September, they’re constantly on our case so it can look nice for tourists. (homeless person, France)

Begging in France is still prohibited in trains, stations and any railway building. But the action taken by the railway police varies with the group concerned: the reactions of security patrol to organised begging are different to those towards down-and-outs. But even violent clear-outs do not work. Sooner or later, the homeless evictees will return to their spot.

They told me, ‘you push off out of it’, so I went. But I went back this morning anyway, because you still earn more there than on the street (homeless beggar who works the Alésia underground station).

But along with enforcement activities, transport operators also try to manage the homeless population issue in more or less welfare-oriented ways. Since 1977, the Paris city transport authority’s homeless help team (BAPSA RATP) has been doing the rounds of stations, picking up homeless people and transporting them to the Nanterre homeless shelter (CHAPSA) for the night. In 1994, the decriminalization of vagrancy and begging led to the BAPSA being reorganized and renamed
The changing profiles of homeless people

The control of public space by society

The neighbourhood

In the previous section, we saw how homeless people can become a part of the neighbourhood and can rely on solidarity acts from ‘their neighbours’. In all countries, some elements of solidarity between homeless people and the ‘their neighbourhood’ could be found. In Spain, the interviewees generally speak positively about their relationship with their neighbours. For the most part, all the interviewees had received help or support. This help from private benefactors leads to closer relationships when the time in the street is prolonged and ends in a relationship of a mutual exchange of small favours which reinforces and consolidates life in the streets:

I’m in the street... some 14 years. (...) Where I slept, there was like a door to a storeroom, in a restaurant, there was a space, well I slept there. In the morning the owner brought me coffee, breakfast. He let me sleep there. I spent three or four years sleeping there. Imagine the trust, when they didn’t have change, they gave me 50, 100 euro notes, “here, go get change.” Sometimes I take a while because I can’t find any. I leave my stuff there, put my knapsack in the shop and go and look for change. (Abdul, Moroccan homeless, Spain)

Unfortunately, also the opposite reaction takes place. In certain neighbourhoods some clear NIMBY-reactions against the presence of homeless people or the presence of a shelter occur. We shall deal with examples from France, Spain and the Czech Republic.

People living in the vicinity of homeless hostels and shelters in France frequently complain about the nuisance caused locally by users, who are sometimes castigated as posing a threat to public order and health. These perceptions by local residents are frequently instrumental in driving active displays of rejection of homeless people: claims of brawling and aggressive behaviour by hostel users, noise (shouting and screaming), being smelly and dirty, and filth in the street (bottles, excrement and vomit, papers and refuse). Local residents describe these as personal injuries, and their feelings about homeless people feed the fears and concerns about the safety of their families and themselves. Beyond that, there are also fears about the quality of the environment and quality of life (effect on shops, and perceived threat to property values; the physical appearance and antisocial behaviour of users wandering about the streets, urinating in public or engaging in aggressive begging). The conflicts that erupt in these communities centre on fear
In my Caravan, I feel like Superman and on neighbourhood decline. Some residents form groups, get up petitions that they submit to politicians, and may take active steps against the presence of hostels to preserve their quiet neighbourhood and quality of life. In some areas, meetings are held, attended by local residents and all the individuals and government bodies concerned by the problem.

In the Czech Republic, the social service providers operating in Prague have been pressing for the establishment of a winter night shelter for homeless people who sleep rough. They have the support of the capital's municipal administration, but the efforts are hindered by the fact that the City of Prague is divided into 22 districts, each with their own local authority administering the territory. Without the approval of these district authorities, the City of Prague authority cannot establish a winter emergency shelter anywhere in the city.

This was clearly demonstrated in winter 2004-2005 when, in succession, four remote areas were chosen for a temporary winter shelter, but all four district authorities refused the plans. In winter 2005-2006 a temporary winter shelter was set up in rented premises of an empty, privately owned building, but after a short time a populist campaign was set up expressing xenophobic attitudes and the night shelter was closed.

Similarly in Spain, fear and distrust provoke problems with neighbours:

"People like us, in the street; they don’t want us, that’s the truth. For example, once, he doesn’t remember because he was drunk, when they brought him here (the Samu). It was because a lady complained and they called the health services: ‘with so much space, why don’t you go away? I don’t want you under my windows.’ We were sleeping near them, near her windows, and she wanted to water. (homeless person, Spain)"

Public opinion

There is also a more subtle kind of violence that does not require blows, or even words to break the resistance and the morale of the homeless. Sometimes the greatest violence is in a tiny, everyday, almost intangible gesture, something as simple as a glance, which nevertheless can unchain an enormous amount of destruction in the person that receives it and feels it as a judgement, an unjust sentence that cannot be appealed. In Hungary Studio Metropolitana and Double Decker regularly conduct telephone surveys in Budapest (under the authority of the Local Council) in order to collect information on the opinions of the citizens on important issues affecting life in the capital. In a survey that covered homelessness, data was collected using standardised questionnaires, by trained interviewers, using the method of telephone interviews. The representative sample included 300 respondents over 18 years of age, living in Budapest.
Two thirds of the respondents acknowledged that homeless people have the right
to use public space. However, many do not welcome them in the inner city (30%),
or on public transport (20%). Almost half of them argued that homeless people
should be evicted from underpasses. On the other hand 20 % think they should be
allowed to sleep in the metro stations in winter. Two thirds, mostly women and the
elderly concerned about their own safety, believe that people who are homeless
should be removed from the streets and forced to use social services facilities and
shelters. Nearly half of the respondents replied that they buy some of the magazines
written and sold by people who are homeless. The majority never or only sometimes
take the magazine in return for the donation. The majority of those who accept the
paper only take a glance; only one third reads it thoroughly. The respondents seem
to have a certain selection mechanism when giving an individual support. Politeness
and a nice personality are the most significant, followed by the criteria that they
should not appear to be alcoholic. Some people prefer to help the most ragged,
run-down homeless. Many were reluctant to give to homeless people if asked in
the metro, bus stop or in their car; the reason being that in such situations they
might feel frustrated, cornered and forced, without the possibility to refuse or
escape, or at least make a free decision. Half of the respondents prefer to support
the elderly, whereas beggars with children and dogs were not seen as attractive.

In the Brussels neighbourhood, Les Marolles (Belgium), we interviewed young
people who are driving the gentrification of the area, chiefly higher-educated single
households or couples without children who recently discovered the neigh-
bourhood. They like the multicultural atmosphere of the neighbourhood and they
see it as part of the deal that some inconveniences may occur due to the fact that
they live in a former deprived neighbourhood. In contrast with the requests of
removal of homeless people in the Hungarian capital by the respondents of the
telephone test, this group tolerates the presence of the old inhabitants of the neigh-
bourhood. Not one of those interviewed associated otherness with a need for more
repression. They perceive their neighbourhood as places of ‘we’ and places of
‘them’. Nevertheless, this tolerance did not end in more solidarity with the poor and
homeless people of the neighbourhood. The main answer was that helping homeless
people is a task of the State.

The infrastructural control of public space

Besides the direct control of public space by security services, neighbours or other
users of public space, some small interventions can be sufficient to affect and
control the way of living of people who are homeless. An enormous effort in design,
aimed at driving away undesirables, can be seen in architecture, urban furniture or
sign-posting. Anti-homeless benches, gates and fences, apparently innocent
decorative elements, which nevertheless stop anyone from sitting under a roof or
glass canopy, are spreading all over the cities. The shopping area around Oslo railway station has expanded during the last six-seven years. The interior of the station is growing into a shopping mall. Besides the privatisation of the interior public spaces by the expansion of the shopping and restaurant area, the waiting hall has transformed into a hostile environment for homeless people. There are no benches suited to lying down, the chairs are separated by armrests. At the nearby bus station, there are some resting places shaped in elegant, but unpleasant stone material. In France, Gilles Paté (1995) has shown how ‘hygienic benches’, real ‘beds of nails’ are carefully designed so as to deter lying down. In Luxembourg City’s main railway station, to discourage people from lingering, the benches were taken out, leaving only a waiting room. This has radically changed the station’s practical value for homeless people.

Recently, the local council of the 7th district of Budapest ordered the installation of armrests on benches in public areas, so as to prevent them from being used for lying and sleeping. For the homeless, this implies an adaptation of their living and sleeping habits. Public opinion about this intervention is rather divided. One third of the respondents (of the telephone survey, performed by Studio Metropolitana and Double Decker) agreed with the decision, they welcomed that the benches are back to their intended use, for sitting on. Many argue that the homeless should sleep in shelters, not in the streets. Others find it visually disturbing that the homeless are around and have fear of catching diseases and are concerned about the unpleasant smell. The majority of the respondents, however, did not agree with the alteration of the benches. They argue that everyone has the right to sit or lie down wherever they want in public areas. Some add that sleeping in the benches was at least some kind of solution compared to the present consequence of sleeping on the ground.

Policy lessons and conclusions

In order to analyse the use of public space, homeless people’s perception of public space and the conflicts in public space, a hypothesis was drafted, based on the experience of street workers and workers from walk-in services, that more autonomous homeless people have different understandings of public space and practices in public space than drifting homeless people. The autonomous homeless people try to transform the public space to some kind of home and they often form relationships with the local residents. Drifting homeless people have no permanent place; they sometimes sleep on the bare pavement. As indicated in this chapter, those interviewed belong somewhere in the continuum between these two extreme points. Nevertheless, some general conclusions and policy lessons for both groups can be drawn.
In the first place, we notice a lack of places where homeless people could take care of their personal hygiene. They often have to resort to very basic and improvised hygiene strategies. Natural sources such as rivers, or the use of public toilets or toilets in bars or restaurants, are not preferred solutions, but are a necessity. Therefore, the improvement in the number of services would allow homeless people to wash, shave and take a shower more easily.

Secondly, the interviews offered an insight into the most important factors concerning the feeling of home. Safety, the proximity of others, the distance from possible enemies and invisibility seem to be the most important factors. The busy city centre and public transport are for many homeless people the places for hanging around where they feel most comfortable and at home. This means that shelters should not be too far from these most populated, busy areas. Yet, there is a trend in some countries towards a decentralisation of these shelters and towards a move to the ghettos and suburbs. Being part of a vibrant urban life and of a particular neighbourhood seems to be very valuable for people who are homeless. Unfortunately, these areas are also the places that other users of public space indicate as places ‘they would rather not have any homeless persons’.

Thirdly, there are disturbing attempts to solve the problems with homeless people through persecution, repression, agitation and harassment. Especially local politicians (in the large cities) try to force people who are homeless out of their territory to neighbouring areas, from the city centre to the outskirts, from the outskirts to the centre or beyond the city limits. This leads to a growing social exclusion and segregation of homeless people from other citizens. Also the trend towards a criminalisation of people who are homeless through the implementation of stricter rules on begging makes the paths of homeless people more and more complex. Ultimately, this buck-passing is orchestrated by the central and local authorities. Decentralisation splits public policy responsibilities – especially housing policies – between the national and local levels. Improved cooperation between the different policy levels and security services is necessary.

Finally, we notice a narrowing of the sleeping options of people who are homeless in public space. Due to trends such as monitoring and surveillance of public spaces and the increasing privatisation of public space, the possibilities of finding a place to sleep in places such as railway stations or metros have decreased noticeably. Also other trends in neighbourhoods such as gating, surveillance, locking the entrance of residential buildings or the adaptation or even complete abolition of urban furniture restrict the sleeping options of the homeless.

Therefore political actors should note that due to these trends, conflicts in public space might increase and that other options for people who are homeless will be necessary. Besides, without access to any sources of heat, the health risks of
homeless people will also increase. This might indicate a growing need for accommodation (not only services for sleeping but perhaps also the availability of places for their daily needs), even without the increase of the homeless population. Yet, the establishment of shelters does not seem to occur without problems. The strategy of NIMBY reactions, resulting from fear and distrust, tend to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy as it feeds and reinforces the danger for those who are trying to protect themselves, since the segregation and forced distancing from others makes living together more and more difficult for everyone. The overall impression is that there are very few places where homeless people can settle down. Many of those interviewed emphasised that they have to behave well in order to be allowed to stay in certain public places, although it is not always enough to behave well. Roofless people may also be chased away because they are in the wrong place, despite their behaviour. Therefore, an urban strategy that runs counter to current trends is essential: one that nourishes the opportunities for mixing and interchanging, through the multiplication and the creation of public spaces which are open and hospitable, to which all kinds of people would come willingly and would have no problem in sharing (Bauman, 2006).
References


In my Caravan, I feel like Superman


Anal’za situace bezdomovc na Uzeml M Praha 11


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In my Caravan,
I feel like Superman

Essays in honour of Henk Meert 1963-2006

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This volume is a celebration of the life and work of Henk Meert. The principal authors of six of the chapters were members of the European Observatory on Homelessness during the period of Henk’s leadership (2001-2006). The final two chapters are hitherto unpublished papers written by Henk and his co-authors.

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