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Dennis P. Culhane
University of Pennsylvania, culhane@upenn.edu

Thomas Byrne
University of Pennsylvania, byrnet@sp2.upenn.edu

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Preface

Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities for Research and Policy

The European Parliament recently passed a Written Declaration "calling for an ambitious EU homelessness strategy and support to Member States in their efforts towards ending homelessness" (FEANTSA, December 21, 2010). The Written Declaration comes on the heels of a consensus conference on homelessness held in Brussels, in which researchers from the European Observatory (some featured in this volume) made the moral *and* empirical case for urgent and strategic action by all member countries of the EU. This leadership has proven to be critically influential as the European Commission moves forward with its antipoverty goals for 2020. This timely volume will help bring further momentum to this cause, by framing much of what has been learned, and many of the important questions yet to be addressed in this highly complex, multinational context.

Among researchers and policymakers, the overall direction for homelessness policy – expanding access to stable and affordable housing, with appropriate supports – seems now to be a consensus opinion. Beyond that, the details necessary for a coherent pan-European homelessness strategy will require substantial new knowledge development. As illustrated by the chapters in this volume, researchers are engaged in the challenging work of operationalizing the homelessness problem and establishing evidence-based practices that can be scaled up in a multinational, and "multi-sociopolitical" environment. While daunting, much progress has been made.

Determining exactly how to define homelessness is a crucial first step for understanding the problem, and since its publication in 2005 the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) has offered researchers in Europe (and abroad) a thoroughly well conceptualized definition of homelessness and residential instability. In this regard, the ETHOS statement is a major achievement, and a critical starting point for comparative research and policy analysis. Nonetheless, countries have not yet fully aligned their definitions of homelessness and housing exclusion, and partly as a result, measuring the scope and extent of homelessness in Europe still remains a significant obstacle. As Volker Busch-Geertsema notes in his chapter, measurement efforts have proceeded particularly slowly when considering roofless and houseless persons, the most vulnerable categories of persons in the ETHOS typology and the groups that are most

commonly agreed upon across countries as being homeless. Busch-Geertsema observes that a number of countries have made important progress in enumeration both through survey methods and administrative data. Yet major gaps remain for establishing an EU estimate. Many countries still need to work with researchers to establish regular and ongoing measurement procedures, either based upon household surveys, administrative data or service-based methods. Such periodic and reliable estimates will be essential to setting goals for reducing homelessness and for monitoring progress towards achieving them. This remains a stubborn challenge, despite the achievement of the ETHOS typology, and is likely to become a high priority as the new European Parliament's commitment to Member States' strategies moves forward.

Beyond the importance of addressing issues of definition and measurement, understanding the implications for research and policy across the various social welfare regimes within Europe presents another challenging task. Indeed, the nature of homelessness and housing exclusion, as well as responses to these problems, can only be fairly understood in the contexts of the varying social policy frameworks that have evolved within the member countries of the EU. Here, Eoin O'Sullivan offers an expanded and more nuanced version of Esping-Anderson's classic typology of the different philosophies and orientations of European welfare regimes. The existence of such international diversity provides a natural laboratory for examining which social welfare models, and which strategies in particular are best suited to responding to homelessness, either from a preventive or remedial vantage point. Rigorous empirical tests of these relationships has not yet been possible, owing to limited cross-national population data, as noted by Busch-Geertsema. Detailed case studies (Stephens and Fitzpatrick, 2007) have thus been required, suggesting among other findings, that prevention of homelessness is strongest in social democratic regimes, and the weakest in Mediterranean countries and some eastern European transition nations.

However, O'Sullivan cautions that the institutional mediation of broad policy approaches at a local level are critical to understanding how differences in social welfare regimes are ultimately translated. Moreover, the "moving target" nature of contemporary policy shifts, as EU member states grapple with immigration and other social changes wrought by EU integration, globalization, and the economic crisis, have rendered tentative some presumed conclusions based on classical typologies. For example, Nora Teller's chapter here calls attention to the growing number of people in Europe facing situations of housing vulnerability due to shifting dynamics in housing and labour markets, as well as the diminishing role of states in housing provision. O'Sullivan also observes recent changes in immigration and incarceration policies that are skewing more to a US model than to traditional

European approaches. Thus, the adaptation of the Esping-Anderson framework to homelessness here opens further an area ripe for future research, both of a qualitative and quantitative nature, and from which much is yet to be learned.

Antonio Tosi suggests that such future research on homelessness in Europe would be well served by adopting a theoretical framework that places homelessness interventions squarely within the broader context of poverty. Tosi argues that adopting such a perspective carries the potential to resolve some of the shortcomings of policies that embrace exclusively either a structural or individual explanation for homelessness. From this perspective, homelessness is perhaps more appropriately viewed not simply as a deprivation of housing or inadequate access to economic or social resources, but rather as an individual incapacity to make use of resources to resolve a situation of housing instability, even when those resources may be available. As Tosi notes, the risk in operating from this perspective is that it may unnecessarily pathologize those experiencing housing instability. However, Tosi argues for combining structural and individual perspectives through housing and support policies that target different types of homelessness (temporary, long-term) with customized interventions (prevention, supported housing) that are flexible and effective at engaging individuals "where they are." This conceptual framework may well help to establish an integrative perspective for intervention research in the EU, mixing both structural and individual components.

From such an intervention perspective, the diversity of prevailing welfare and housing regimes also provides researchers with an opportunity to explore how various advocacy and program strategies can be translated into different social, political and cultural contexts. This volume includes several valuable chapters that explore the merits and drawbacks of such strategies. Isobel Anderson attempts to answer the long-standing question of what is the appropriate role of both housing and additional services in confronting homelessness and housing exclusion. Anderson asserts that the provision of housing must ultimately be seen as the primary solution to homelessness, and that, while distinct from their housing needs, the additional health and social service needs of individuals need to be addressed as well. Though it appears that various countries are generally moving in this direction, little research has compared how countries manage the roles of housing and services. Research in this area will be key to informing evidence-based practices, as it remains unclear how closely linked housing and services should be, or *can* be given the different bases by which they are funded and regulated in most countries.

In their chapter, Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Beth Watts examine the potential viability and effectiveness of rights-based advocacy approaches to homelessness. In weighing the benefits and limitations of such approaches, the critical issue is untangling exactly what such rights (if obtained) ultimately confer on those persons who assert them. In this regard, Fitzpatrick and Watts point out that advocacy interventions that aim to obtain a right to housing for all homeless persons will only be successful to the extent that such a right is legally enforceable. Yet, in cases where a right to housing is enforced by the judicial system, there are potential drawbacks; such a situation risks placing important policy decisions in the hands of courts rather than in those of elected governments. In countries where such a right is not enforceable in court, a rights-based framework can still be used by these countries legislatively, and by the EU, to strengthen responses to homelessness. The recent Written Declaration serves to reinforce this point, citing homelessness as a violation of fundamental human rights, and demanding that Member States take concrete action to achieve progress. How various countries translate this mandate, how advocacy groups will vary in trying to make these claims operational, and to what effect, will require continuing monitoring and analysis, as presaged by the authors here.

Additional chapters ask whether there are particular interventions that should be targeted at special sub-populations of persons facing homelessness and housing exclusion. Taken together, these chapters suggest that an argument can be made for approaching homelessness as a problem that affects a set of distinct sub-groups and consequently, for tailoring solutions according to each group's respective needs.

Deborah Quilgars describes the importance of research that has outlined a number of pathways that may lead youth into homelessness as they transition into adulthood (e.g. being forced to leave family before securing independent housing, exiting care of the child welfare system). However, there is less clarity regarding other important issues around youth homelessness. For example, differences between countries as to what constitutes the upper age boundary of youth, complicates efforts to estimate the prevalence of youth homelessness. Nonetheless, there is consensus that homeless youth have unique housing needs that require interventions tailored to their situations. Here, promising initial evidence on innovative approaches to youth homelessness is reported from the UK and Ireland. This preliminary research highlights just how much there is to be gained from testing these and other strategies in additional countries.

Like homeless youth, homeless women have distinct housing needs that have not been fully illuminated by previous research. Indeed, as Isabella Baptista observes, the fact that relatively few women are found among rough sleepers and those in emergency accommodations means that homelessness among women is more

likely to remain hidden and that consequently, the housing needs of homeless women may be overlooked. While much remains to be learned about the dynamics of homelessness among women, researchers have been paying increasing attention to homeless women in recent years. This research, summarized here, has proved valuable in the development of innovative service delivery models for homeless women that have been implemented in Germany and other countries.

Whereas there is important descriptive research pointing to the potential effectiveness of different strategies for addressing homelessness among youth and women, there is very little information about the housing needs of homeless migrants in Europe. This is noteworthy, as homelessness among migrants poses new challenges for European countries in the context of the expansions in EU membership that have occurred over the past decade. Nicholas Pleace's presentation of a typology of migrant homelessness is particularly useful in this regard. Pleace provides a framework for understanding the housing needs of different migrant groups, and suggests potential avenues to address the housing needs of these groups. However, Pleace acknowledges that fashioning effective responses to migrant homelessness is a vexing challenge as any strategy to do so must out of necessity breach the domain of national and supra-national immigration policies.

Without a doubt, the development of interventions that are effective at meeting the housing needs of particular sub-populations of persons experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion represents an important task. However, broader strategies at the national level are equally important so as to create and maintain a focus on larger scale efforts to reduce homelessness. In this respect, the leadership of FEANTSA has been critical in getting countries to articulate national strategies to end homelessness, even before the recent mandates under the Written Declaration. In their chapter, Lars Benjaminsen and Evelyn Dyb compare a number of these national strategies and note how they represent a departure from past *ad hoc* approaches to homelessness, which were more narrowly focused and less coordinated. The ideals and content of these national strategies is encouraging in that they largely espouse a desire to end homelessness by embracing evidenced-based interventions that emphasize the provision of permanent housing as the key to solving homelessness. These goals are important, and set the stage for numerical targets that can be used to measure meaningful progress towards ending homelessness. This point again underscores the need for countries to engage in regular and periodic data collection efforts.

The creation of national strategies as well as the valuable body of research on homelessness covered by the chapters in this volume demonstrates that meaningful strides have been made in the domains of both policy and research towards ending homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU. The crucial role of the European

Observatory on Homelessness in these developments has been particularly noteworthy. The Observatory is a well respected voice in the international discourse about homelessness. This volume is the latest instalment to their valuable and continuously improving body of research. Moving forward, the policy and research advances represented here will continue to be of great benefit to all member countries, and indeed to the international research and policy community overall.

› References

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Dennis P. Culhane and Thomas Byrne
University of Pennsylvania