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# Homelessness – Press, Policies and Public Opinion in Portugal

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› **Abstract** *The incessant demands on audiences by the media, allied to a greater or lesser extent to the prevailing political ideology, decisively influences the perception or depiction of reality. This phenomenon has been the subject of several studies, the results pointing to the influence that narratives constructed by the media in general and the press, in particular, contributes to the development of stereotypes around certain individuals and social groups. Newspapers comply with the construction of social reality through the way they broadcast the news, whether favourable, tolerant or stigmatizing, especially with regard to vulnerable groups of people including homeless people. Furthermore, newspapers mirror the way that actors face and reinforce (or otherwise) this reality in the context of society and social intervention. The proliferation of social and charitable groups targeting homeless people is also observed; this increasing social mobilization movement to provide assistance is not necessarily resulting in an improved quality of life for homeless people. It involves distributing food and clothing on the streets, which effectively perpetuates the situation of homeless people by reproducing and extending the exercise of charity. It even involves politicians who ‘use’ homeless people to highlight their campaigns, even in the face of diminishing social support policies. This study aims to provide a qualitative content analysis of the treatment that the press gave to homeless people over two distinct periods: before and after the period of austerity imposed by the adjustment programme. It aims to analyse and understand whether there are changes to how homeless people are presented by type of news broadcast, and to frame this analysis in the political context prevailing at the time.*

› **Keywords** *Homelessness, homeless people, media/press, social representations, exclusion*

## Introduction

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The exploration of relationships between press, policies and public opinion in forming social representations regarding people experiencing homelessness must be framed by theoretical axes that allow a conceptually oriented reading and a possible interpretation of the content of the collected news. The aim of this paper is to draw a first portrait of the representations of homeless people by the Portuguese press online between 2009 and 2013. It aimed to obtain concrete images of: how much news was published; what kind of facts, events and themes had been written about and how they had been treated; which sources these came from; and who were the protagonists of the news. Given the size of the survey, a thorough textual analysis of all journalistic writing became unfeasible and it was decided that as a first approach, some initial questions were to be answered:

- What happened in the press in terms of the quantity of news articles on homelessness in the two distinct periods – before and after the period of austerity imposed by the adjustment programme (and in which there was a different government programme)?
- Were there any changes during this period in the way that people experiencing homelessness were referred to in the news?

During the analysis, which was framed in the political context, the importance of some of the pictures being published, which sometimes contradicted the textual narratives, became clearer. Taking into account the influence that photos may have on a reader's perceptions of social reality, it was important to pay attention to these visual representations, whether explicitly political or otherwise. This article starts by framing the problem under discussion – the relationship between the role of media and representations on homelessness – followed by a brief overview of social policies in Portugal in the era post-April 25, 1974 and in the latest period of change (2009–2013) that is relevant to the analysis of the news collected. Then, using qualitative methodology based on thematic and categorical content analysis techniques, the study tries to answer some of the initial questions and points to emerging evidence that supports the new working hypotheses.

## Press, Policies and Public Opinion

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The approach of many existing studies is guided by conceptualizations of poverty and social exclusion and they adopt the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion – ETHOS. The definition of homeless persons used within the Portuguese National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People (2009-2015) is also based on ETHOS, although it is more restrictive: “A homeless person is considered to be an individual who, regardless of nationality, age, sex, socio-economic status and mental and physical health, is roofless and living in a public space or insecure form of shelter or accommodated in a emergency shelter, or is houseless and living in temporary accommodation for homeless people.” (GIMAE, 2010, p.18).

How phenomena such as homelessness are represented socially or legally influences collective and individual behaviours and the public policies designed to address them. The media contributes to the construction of such representations. It cannot be said that homelessness is new to the media, research, to the IPSSs (Private Institutions of Social Solidarity) / NGOs, to political speeches or to national and international policy. And yet, the social representations associated with it are assuming a somewhat negative and often stigmatized charge.

As Sousa stated: “although the news represents certain aspects of daily life, its mere existence contributes to the social construction of new realities and new referents” (1999, p.2). In Portugal, it can be said that the late 1980s and the early 1990s were decisive in terms of the design and implementation of social policies, and regulatory relations between state, market and citizens, in particular those addressing the needs of people and vulnerable social groups, including those experiencing homelessness. The media, in turn, brought greater importance to the perpetuation or reformulation of social representations which, according to some studies (cf. Martins, 2007; da Silva, 2011; Torres, 2013) tend to reproduce negative stereotypes about people who are vulnerable and in situations of poverty, and about homeless people in particular, because as McKee (2001, cit. by Torres, 2013) notes: it is constructive to understand stereotypes because they are a dominant form of representation.

Newspapers (paper and online) play a role in constructing reality through the way they spread the news – whether in a manner that is favourable, tolerant or stigmatizing, especially with regard to vulnerable groups such as homeless people. On the other hand, they also reflect how actors (in the context of social intervention) and society in general stand with regard to this reality, as they reinforce – or don't reinforce – this construction.

According to Larsen (2014), the media influence what people think about the poor in general and about beneficiaries of social protection in particular. In his study, *The Poor in Mass Media: Negative Images in the US and UK versus Positive Images in Sweden and Denmark* (2014), carried out between 2004 and 2009, stories about poor people were ranked as 'negative', 'positive' and 'other'. The stories about homeless people were typically framed as positive ones, though there were some differences between countries (the UK and the US were less positive, while Sweden and Denmark were more positive). In the stories ranked as negative, the most obvious topic was the fraudulent abuse of benefits.

Larsen considers that the differences in poverty levels and the universalism of the social protection system influences the number of negative stories about poor people. In Portugal, da Silva (2011) included an analysis of the press (542 news articles) between 2005 and 2009 in her doctoral thesis, concluding that the issue of homelessness has been gradually gaining increased coverage in the news since 2005; that 74 percent of the news collected between 2005 and 2009 originated in homeless organisations; that the districts of Lisbon and Porto are those that produce the most news on the phenomenon of homelessness; that the homeless organisations are distinct from each other; that the municipality of Lisbon and religious institutions share news with each other that relates to the phenomenon of homelessness; and that it is unclear whether it is the marketing by the homeless organisations is feeding the press or whether the media are collectively using the same sources of information.

The author also points out that the media convey especially negative social representations about people experiencing homelessness, often linking them to the use of psychoactive substances. According to this author, only a few articles report on daily routines or sociability issues related to homeless people, and she highlights the potential contribution of this kind of news article to mitigating negative stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness.

Another issue is the proliferation of charitable partner groups that aim to help homeless people by distributing food and clothing on the streets, but who actually contribute to maintaining homelessness rather than contributing to any real change. A further issue is that of politicians who use the homelessness theme as one of their campaigns. In the current environment, while social support is being reduced, there is social mobilization in favour of welfare support and a sense of achievement from supporters, though without any direct effect on the life quality of homeless people. The media seems to contribute to an increasingly paternalistic view, labelling people in situations of homelessness as victims or as responsible for their situation. This label seems to depend upon the ability of 'service providers' or journalists to relate to socially vulnerable groups.

## The Social Policy Context

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Informal networks and partnership within the social arena have a long tradition in Portugal, particularly among social work professionals. Portugal's accession to the EU on January 1, 1986 was a particularly important turning point that increased political incentive for partnerships, particularly social and employment partnerships. These were strengthened by the emergence of European Programmes against Poverty (PELCP II, 1986-1989), which involved research projects on vulnerable groups, and PELCP III (1989-1994), with its focus on territorial projects. This programme launched a more comprehensive use of the concept of social exclusion.

From the mid 1990s, the government, recognizing the importance of existing informal networks, headed a set of territorial social policies based on working partnerships. A number of programmes arose from this, including the Regional Employment Networks, the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI), Children and Youth Protection Committees (CPCJ), the Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour (PECL), the Educational Territories for Priority Intervention (TEIP) and the Social Network Programme. These helped develop new local skills in terms of participation, knowledge, planning and models of organization and helped promote a new relationship between the Central Administration and local and Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS).

Up until 2009, a favourable political context existed in which the Open Method of Coordination introduced by the European Council helped to boost social policies in each European country, with the aim of promoting social cohesion and the knowledge society. The growing size of the homeless population in the country and the fact that the Portuguese National Action Plan for Inclusion referenced homelessness were crucial elements leading to the National Strategy on Homeless People in 2009, following a national study by the Social Security Institute in 2007. Despite the fact that the National Strategy was designed and implemented by a group of public and private entities from different sectors, all of which committed to the strategy in a public signing by the Minister of Social Security, it had weak political commitment (Baptista, 2014).

Although the implementation process was begun eagerly by local authorities, which opened Centres for the Integration of Homeless People, there has been a marked decrease in implementation and central coordination since 2011, at which point there was not only a change of government but the national and international socio-economic crisis (according to Eurostat data, people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU27 grew from 116 million in 2008 to 121 million in 2013), the intervention of the Troika in Portugal (advocating austerity measures) and a regression of investment in social policies.

## Qualitative Methodology: Exploratory Use of Content Analysis

This analysis starts with the assumption that not only do the media contribute to the construction of social reality, but that they also reproduce and/or reinforce stereotypes. Qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate for this exploratory study with its focus on news relating to homeless people between 2009 and 2013 (an exhaustive analysis was not performed; 69 online newspapers were covered).

The summary table below gives an outline of the stages in the research process.

<b>Data collection</b>	2009-2013: Google alerts on the term 'homelessness'
<b>Data coding</b>	Cross validation – themes and sub-themes, sources, protagonists (homeless people, institutions, leaders, public figures), geographic location (national, regional and international), numerical data or statistics. We proceeded to categorization of the news using a typology (news, reportage, interviews, fait-divers, other) proposed by other authors.
<b>Data analysis</b>	Categories – Representations of homeless people, NGOs and politicians, protagonists of news Non-exhaustive collection of data

It was decided to analyse the textual discourse of collected news through a simple investigation of either the titles or the text itself, a procedure already used by other authors, such as Torres (2013). The analysis looked at themes and sub-themes, fonts, protagonists (homeless people, institutions/leaders, public figures), geographic location (national, regional and international), and numerical data or statistics. We then proceeded to a further categorization of news using a typology proposed by other authors, which involved the categories of news, reportage, interviews and other (e.g., Sousa and Almeida, 2001).

The variety of journalism and news about homeless people allowed us to discover, in some way, who is behind the news – who has the capacity and the power to produce and convey this type of information. Knowing the sources of news also provides a pattern in terms of protagonists and themes; sometimes the sources are the same as the protagonists. Furthermore, news articles often appeared accompanied by images, the so-called 'iconic symbols' referred to by Lampreia (2008), making otherwise invisible messages turn into visible ones, sometimes contradicting the textual narratives. Photos are visual representations that can influence the reader/viewer positively or negatively, shaping their perceptions of social reality.

## Presentation of Results

In presenting the results of the study, the first part is a brief quantitative characterization of the sample obtained through Google alerts. The second part is the qualitative consideration of titles and contents of the same news, looking to synthesize a profile for homeless people and a profile for the institutions that support these people.

### *Brief quantitative characterization of the news*

News from 69 newspapers was received through Google alerts. These were grouped geographically and thematically, as shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Number of newspapers according to newspaper type**

Newspapers	Number	percent
National	16	23 percent
Regional	14	20 percent
Local	6	9 percent
Specific sectors (sports, religious)	6	9 percent
Newspapers/TV/radio (Media Capital, SIC, TVI24, iOnline, TSF)	15	22 percent
Foreign press	2	3 percent
Other	10	14 percent
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100 percent</b>

The highest number of news articles on homelessness were seen in national newspapers (16) followed by newspapers/TV/radio (Media Capital, SIC, TVI24 iOnline, TSF) (15) and regional newspapers (14), allowing that there has been news with considerable territorial coverage.

The distribution of news over time points to a smaller number of article in 2010 and 2011, with a noticeable increase in articles online, arising from television news reports in 2012 and 2013 (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Number of news articles/type of newspaper /year**

Newspaper	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
National	22	11	15	26	46
Regional	13	6	7	6	12
Local	11	2	0	6	0
Specific sectors (sports, religious)	3	3	2	3	1
Newspapers/TV/radio (Media Capital, SIC, TVI24 iOnline, TSF)	6	4	1	20	18
Foreign press	1	0	0	0	3
Other	1	5	0	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>258</b>	22 percent	12 percent	10 percent	25 percent	31 percent

News articles were further categorized according to the journalistic style in which they were written. Some fell into two categories, particularly where news articles were accompanied by interviews of some description but where the interview was not the principal subject of publication (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Typology of news (2009-2013)**

Typology	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>News</b>	45	28	17	50	59
<b>Reportage</b>	9	3	3	4	7
<b>Interview</b>	18	3	2	8	5
<b>Opinion</b>	3		3	0	7
<b>Fait-Divers</b>	1	1	0	9	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>287</b>	26 percent	12 percent	9 percent	25 percent	28 percent

'Protagonists of the news' were considered those elements that were directly targeted in the news article, regardless of how the subject was expressed (interview, keynote address). Here, there is greater constancy over the different years in terms of institutions and institution leaders, while homeless people themselves only play a major role in 2009 and 2013 (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Protagonists of news (2009-2013)**

Protagonists	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Homeless people</b>	40	4	21	26	48
<b>NGO institutions/directors</b>	42	23	12	35	30
<b>Public services</b>	28	16	1	18	3
<b>VIP</b>	5		1	8	9
<b>Other</b>	30	14	4	41	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>96</b>

Using a simple grading scale for the representation of protagonists (positive, negative, neutral), homeless people are represented most frequently in a neutral manner, which is in clear contrast to the significantly positive representation of institutions or their directors and other stakeholders. Moreover most news articles represent homeless people as a relatively homogenous group, especially those published in 2009 (27) and 2012 (31) (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Representation of protagonists (2009-2013)**

Protagonists		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>People in situations of homelessness</b>	+	23	3	1	13	15
	-	10	3	4	8	10
	Neutral	25	12	18	28	50
	as a group	27	16	0	31	7
<b>Institutions/directors</b>	+	32	22	7	30	25
	-	2	0	1	1	5
	Neutral	3	1	3	0	5
<b>Other</b>	+	37	12	0	26	2
	-	9	1	0	4	4
	Neutral	4	0	0	0	1

The themes of the articles were categorized based on the framework used in da Silva's (2011) study, using the following themes: cold, Christmas, poverty day/NGO anniversary of National Homeless Strategy, solidarity, economic crisis/unemployment, homelessness count and 'other' (news that is not 'news' in the strict sense of the word, cultural and sporting events, campaigns for donations and the collection of goods, violence and discrimination against people in situations of homelessness, and violence by persons in situations of homelessness).

## **Discourse and the Representation of People in Situations of Homelessness**

There are different approaches in news articles about people experiencing homelessness. In general, they appeal to the emotions of readers through titles that are not always as objective as they should be. For example, the headline 'The Reality of Homelessness is Worse than was Thought' suggests a dramatic reality in terms of poverty and social exclusion, while the actual aim of the article is to highlight the concerns of institutions in Coimbra that work in this field. The article goes on to say: "the first count and characterization of homeless people in Coimbra, developed at the initiative of (...), corresponds to a more serious scenario than was thought," said the Director of the Association. In the first two days, almost 180 cases were identified.' (Diary of Coimbra, 02.02.2013).

There are several stories written on the changing profile of homeless people and the characteristics of this profile, as well as on concerns about initiatives for counting homeless people, which were probably written to justify the funding needs of institutions. One article reported on a survey carried out under the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People (Lusa, 28.03.2011), which showed that 2 133 people were homeless; sleeping on the streets, in cars or in abandoned houses; or staying in temporary shelters. It further showed that this population was

predominantly male (84 percent), aged between 30 and 49 (60 percent), and educated to the sixth grade (54 percent), and that family breakdown and unemployment were the most frequently mentioned causes of homelessness.

In 2013, fourteen Local Homelessness Planning and Intervention Units (NPISA) provided data on 4420 homeless people; 76 percent were male, and geographically the highest percentage of cases were in Oporto (31 percent) and Lisbon (18 percent), followed by Faro (11 percent), Setubal (9 percent) and Aveiro, Braga, Coimbra and Leiria (4 percent in each district).

The news analysis does not show any significant change in the profile of homeless people over time, though a few articles (at the end of 2011 and in 2013) state that there are more homeless people with levels of higher education and higher professional qualifications. One article refers to 'Graduates among the Homeless People on the Streets', a reference to the fact that the crisis (economic, housing, employment, family breakdown) has led to graduates living on the street and that in Portugal, even people with higher education cannot integrate into society (Correio da Manhã, 21.11.2011). The article also indicates that the homeless profile may be changing (Correio da Manhã, 21.11.2011). Although there were relatively few news articles collected on homeless people in other European countries, a change in the profile of homeless people is also reflected in some countries like Greece. One such article, entitled 'One in Five Homeless People in Greece has a College Degree', clearly referred to the worsening economic crisis there (SIC News, 12/12/2012). Rising rates of unemployment and cuts in social benefits tend to increase the numbers of homeless people, which seems to promote the identification of particular groups of citizens, as in the article: 'Property Owners are Among the New Homeless that the Crisis gave to Portugal' (JP, 13.12.2012). However, an objective analysis of the news doesn't show a major change in the profile of homeless people in this period (2009-2013).

A qualitative profile of homeless people was derived from the analysis using categories involving 'not being...', 'not having...' and 'no power' (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Profile of people in situation of homelessness in the news**

<b>Not being</b>	<b>Not having</b>	<b>No power</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invisible</li> <li>• Faceless</li> <li>• In a group</li> <li>• A victim</li> <li>• An object/instrument</li> <li>• On good/bad behaviour</li> <li>• Dead</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family/friends</li> <li>• Networks</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Income</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Employment (far from labour market dynamics)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No voice</li> <li>• No capacity to claim rights</li> <li>• No means of social participation</li> </ul>

## ***NOT BEING***

**In a group:** ‘Homeless People Sleep Anywhere, In Any Corner. There is Total Insecurity’ (DN Portugal, 25.05.2009)

**An object/instrument:** ‘We Bring Them to Shelters’ (AO, 17.10.2009)

**On good behaviour:** ‘Homeless Person who Returned Engagement Ring has Already Won over 151 Thousand Dollars’ (DN Portugal, 26.02.2013)

**On bad behaviour:** ‘Remand for Homeless Man who Killed his Wife with a Stick’ (Correio da Manhã, 13.12.2012)

**A victim:** ‘Homeless Person Convicted of Stealing Octopus and Shampoo’ (Jornal de Noticias, 31.01.2012)

*Some examples:*



1



2



3

Sources: 1. Jornal de Noticias, 30.12.2009; 2. Destak, 20.10.2010; 3. Público, 22.11.2012.

These iconic pictures show only the bottom of the anonymous bodies of homeless people in public spaces, clearly referring to the invisibility of the individual and reinforcing the stereotype of a homogeneous group that must ultimately be removed from public spaces. In addition, faceless people do not appeal to the humanity of readers/viewers and the textual content of the accompanying news articles refers to slightly different matters than those suggested by the images.

The first photo, which the news article refers to as ‘Homeless People to be Surveyed Nationwide by March’, discusses the counting process of homeless people in seven of the country’s district capitals (Lisbon, Porto, Aveiro, Braga, Coimbra, Faro and Setúbal). The stated aim of the count is to get to “know the weaknesses of each individual, the temptations, trends or dependencies, the conditional but also the potential that can be exploited in the future (...) in charting an alternative life plan (...) in the sense of social inclusion” (Jornal de Noticias, 30.12.2009). The title of the second photo is: ‘Majority of the Homeless Suffer from Mental Illness’. The narrative

focuses on Preben Brandt, a Danish psychiatrist that was one of the speakers at a workshop on 'Mental Illness and Homelessness' that took place at a forum on combating poverty and social exclusion held in Brussels. The psychiatrist said that "poor people are more likely to suffer from mental health problems (...). This idea is reinforced by several international studies, which indicate that between 30-80 percent of homeless Europeans suffer from mental illness" (Destak, 20.10.2010).

The third news item, with the title 'Homeless Census A 'Missed Opportunity'', notes the fact that for the first time, official statistics from the National Statistics Institute included homeless people and it criticises how the census took place and how homeless people were defined – hence the idea of a 'lost opportunity' as can be seen in the following fragment: "(...) to the 2011 Census, the homeless are those who, at the time of the census, were living on the street or in other public spaces such as gardens, subway stations, bus stops, bridges, viaducts or arcades buildings. Because of 'operational issues', they excluded people living in hospitals, pension rooms funded by Social Security or community centres"; thus, it goes on, "the Census 2011 was a long way from represented the numbers of those who live on the streets." (Público, 22.11.2012).

These situations, including the invisibility issue highlighted in the Census in terms of the quantification of homeless people, is illustrated by photos of homeless people as undifferentiated individuals, isolated and faceless. In the case of mental illness, the image seems to jar with the textual content of the news. All of the images reveal a clear view of the world – a judgment on the reality being presented – that reproduces and shapes social beliefs. Images like these, at a time when homelessness is becoming more visible, influence how the issue is perceived and understood by readers/viewers. The images easily overlap with the text. In fact, they show "a problematic reality of the social world politicized, for good and for evil, and their receptors." (Machado, 2013, p.2)

### **NOT HAVING**

**Housing:** 'The Streets of Ponta Delgada Host about a Dozen Homeless People' (AO, 17.10.2009); 'Arcades Serve as Shelter For the Homeless of Braga' (Diário Minho, 7.11.2011)



1



2



3



4

Sources: 1. DN Portugal, 17.12.2010; 2. DN Portugal, 22.1.2011; 3. DN Portugal, 20.07.2011;

4. <http://pt.dreamstime.com/imagens-de-stock-sem-abrigo-desempregados-com-fome-image8340134>, no date.

The most common news articles relating to 'not having' are about exclusion in the housing sector and the cold that gets worse in winter (especially in the Christmas season), bearing in mind that this type of exclusion also reveals other kinds of exclusion. The photos match this theme, revealing the permanent presence of homeless people on the streets caused by multiple forms of exclusion. The first news article is entitled 'Cold Means Extra Help is Needed for Homeless'; relating particularly to the cities of Lisbon and Viseu. It refers to the need to ensure that homeless people are given extra help during the low temperatures, with a meteorologist adding details such as: "cold air intake with some precipitation, which, from December 23<sup>rd</sup>, may mean snow for altitudes above 600 meters" (DN Portugal, 17.12.2010).

The second news item entitled 'Contingency Plan for Homeless Remains in Place' refers to the plan put in place in the city of Lisbon due to very low temperatures; authorities organised temporary reception centres with hot food and drink where homeless people could escape the cold. (DN Portugal, 22.1.2011).

"'Housing First' Helps 65 Homeless People To Get Off the Streets' is the title of the third news item, referring to one of the success stories. The article mentions Anabela, a 45-year-old poet who had never organized her poems in a book and who "returned to life" after making the decision to participate in the Housing First programme that helped 65 mentally ill homeless people to get off the streets of Lisbon (DN Portugal, 20.07.2011). The fourth image refers to the increase in unemployed and hungry homeless people (no date).

These images show homeless people in urban public space. Their purpose is to reinforce stereotypes about homeless people – people without any of the reference markers of social integration in contemporary society: family and social networks, housing, food, health, income and employment. The invisibility of the individuals' faces, serving to omit any distinguished traits, seems to legitimize the status quo and reproduce or create the apprehension, understanding and feelings of readers/viewers.

### ***NO POWER***

**No voice:** 'One of the Hardest Jobs is to Convince Them to Get off the Streets' (Destak, 3.11.09)

**No voice:** 'There is no Appropriate Law to Protect People who Live on the Streets' (a person who experienced homelessness) (DN Portugal, 6.12.13).

**No capacity to claim rights:** "When the homeless person comes back for a second meal, he will be presented with the life plan that the association has prepared for him and he will have some time to think about whether he wants to accept it. (...) If he doesn't, he will have to leave. We will not feed his situation" (Jornal de Noticias, 19.12.09)

Not only the titles but the news articles themselves show how homeless people are deprived of a voice and the power of decision-making, and how the objectives of integration and inclusion get confused with that of clearing the streets. In a report entitled 'Social Security Centre Identifies 60 Homeless', about a programme that included residential accommodation, it was stated that "one of the most difficult jobs is to convince these people to get off the street."

More than just being deprived of the power of decision-making, the help being offered is often conditional upon accepting the proposals and decisions of others, as in the article 'Dining Rooms Offer Lunch and Life Alternatives': "A card that entitles them to ten meals was created, and during the time that they are here, we try to collect all the information we can about them. After getting to know their stories, we'll create an alternative life plan. When the homeless person comes back for a second meal, he will be presented with the life plan that the association has prepared for him and he will have some time to think about whether he wants to accept it. If he does, when he gets to his tenth meal, he has to decide to embrace this alternative. If he doesn't, he will have to leave. We will not feed his situation." (Jornal de Noticias, 19.12.2009).

When the issue was the controversial count or census, immediately that the results were available (23.03.2011), there was an increase in the number of articles in which the institutions drew attention to the increase in homelessness caused by the economic crisis (See News institutions of 5: 05: 11, 24.05.11, 08.24.11 (CASA), 16: 10: 11 (ADRA), 1: 11: 11 (AMI) 21: 11: 11).



'More than Five Thousand Homeless in Portugal'

The title of this Public Journal clearly refers to the count of homeless people. However, the picture chosen seems to refer to something completely different.

“At least 4420 people lived in gardens, underground or trucking stations, bus tops, parking lots, sidewalks, overpasses, bridges and shelters emergency in Portugal in 2013. This is the number of people surveyed within the framework of the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People coordinated by the Social Security Institute.” (JP, March 2014)

This article reveals the uncertainty of numbers. The title (over five thousand) does not match the news (4,420), then reports two facts using neutral language: that homeless people are helped within the National Strategy, which is coordinated by the Institute of Social Security.

But the photo suggests other things. What stands out? Faded colours (almost monochrome), night, supposedly illustrating the sleep of a homeless person (no face, as with the statistics). Where is it? On the street with no access to housing; in a typically urban space, but... in front of a bank. Note the chosen framework: a homeless person sleeps under a message from the bank: “first you must save” is the advertised message located at an ATM. Ultimately, this appears to be a veiled message: anybody can become homeless if you don’t save. Signs such as these iconic images contribute not only to the construction of reality, but also to its reproduction, within a neo-liberal framework.

In fact, as Larsen (2014, p.6) states, “stories and pictures in the media form an important basis for creating opinions about ‘the poor’ and welfare recipients.”

## **Discourses and Representations On Homeless Institutions**

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As stated above, this paper started from the hypothesis that the media not only constructs reality (according to the political context), but also that social actors ‘use’ their relationships with homeless people to ‘fit’ this new reality, collecting dividends and reinforcing leadership. An example of this is the news articles in which organisations working with the homeless take the opportunity to report on their history and activities, in most cases through interviews given by the leaders of the organisations (reinforcing the idea already presented in previous studies that they might be the original source of the news). The positioning of the organisations in news articles is at a distance from people experiencing homelessness, and underlining their decision-making capabilities, often using expressions that, apart from indiscriminately homogenising homeless people as a group, reference the homeless person as being in a subordinate position with no voice other than through the filter of the institution.

Most news articles reporting on events of which homeless people are the subject, refer to these people as having a passive role or no role at all, and they highlight the supportive role of institutions or public bodies (such as local authorities). Fundraising for these institutions is a recurrent theme, often linked with decreases in state support. These campaigns are in the form of cultural events (plays, concerts, exhibitions, ballets), presented as a pretext to request solidarity. Institutions are also represented as playing a role of 'saviours' for homeless people, each of them proposing a 'miracle' solution for the integration of their 'beneficiaries', whether through football, the Internet or other activities. Such news articles always reinforce this saviour role, giving voice to institutional leaders about how activities are assumed to solve the problems of homeless people. However, one never hears directly from the actors. Examples include:

'The Homelessness of [name of institution] Ask for Help through Facebook' (DN Portugal, 17.10.2009);

"For every successful mission, the Institution will give voice to another homeless person editing his online profile." and

"Given that [name of institution] has a life project for the homeless, our ultimate goal is to get people off the street and give them a better life" (Ionline, 12.2009);

'Street Soccer Presented As a Miracle Solution – 70 percent of Players Successfully Integrated (Jornal do Barlavento, 1.09.2009)

"(...) the team mobilized to give some comfort to the homeless – aid that, despite the cold, not everyone wanted to take advantage"; "the homeless were collected by street teams" (DN Portugal, 23.01.2011).

A qualitative profile of institutions from the analysis of news articles is summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7. Profile of NGOs working with people experiencing homelessness: NGOs in the media**

IMAGE	Activities/ funding	'Saviours' with miraculous solutions
NGO Directors Description of history Institutional Individualism	Description of NGO activities and financial difficulties, campaigns for collection of goods and donations, requests for funding Campaigns for collection of goods and donations (in practice returned to charitable individualistic work)	Proud presentation of solutions considered by them the best way to solve the problems of homeless people in spite of getting no meaningful results

*Some examples:*



1



2



3

**Sources:**

1. <http://www.asbeiras.pt/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/04-SEM-ABRIGO-CJM.jpg>;
2. <http://www.regiaodeleiria.pt/blog/2010/02/21/peca-musica-para-sem-abrigo-para-ver-hoje-ao-teatro-jose-lucio-da-silva/>
3. <http://liberdadeexpressaoelvas.blogspot.pt/2014/02/elvas-cidade-de-sem-abrigos.html#!/2014/02/elvas-cidade-de-sem-abrigos.html>

## **The Relationship between Existing Social Protection Policy and the Profile of Institutions for Homeless people as Conveyed by News Articles**

It was observed through analysing news articles that the attitudes of the organisations have changed in the current political situation, with charitable intervention (as proposed in the National Strategy) replacing participation-oriented intervention based on partnerships. This attitude, more visible in 2012 and 2013, corresponds to an actual decline in individual support in the field of social protection. However, it was already visible in 2011 through increased references to the economic difficulties of institutions and the numbers of people needing their help increasing far beyond their capacity to help:

‘Solidarity Meals Already Becoming Insufficient for The Homeless’ (Diário das Beiras, 13.05.2011)

‘Official Bodies Cannot Create Rules to Stifle Social Institutions’ (Diário das Beiras, 24.12.2011)

‘NGO Fears that Help Might not be Enough for Everyone’ (TVI24,17.10.2012)

‘Volunteers Have Been Giving Hot Food to the Homeless for a Year’ (DN Portugal, 10.06.2013)

‘Cuts in Social Protection Support may Push Unemployed People to the Street’ (DN Portugal, 10.04.2013)

## Self-Protagonism and The Instrumentalisation of Homelessness

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In addition to the main topics, highlighting the role of some of the players in the news was considered important. This is visible, for example, in interviews with leaders (or Ministers) carrying out charitable actions such as Christmas dinners (“I’m here only for personal reasons”, Minister of Social Affairs, *Jornal de Noticias*, 21.12.2009); former footballers associated with football matches with homeless people (‘Former Football Manager John Barnabas Honoured at the Presentation of the 2009 Selection’, *Barlavento*, 1.09.2009); singers that decide to help people in shelters (‘Mónica Ferraz Sings for Solidarity in Faro’, *Barlavento*, 26.10.2012); or actors that are inspired in a role by the lives of homeless people. This trend of certain personalities appearing in the news for these reasons is more apparent from 2012:

“Amy Winehouse invited a homeless girl to go live with and let her stay in her apartment for six months.” (22.11.2012);

‘Gene Hackman Slaps Homeless Man in Legitimate Self-Defence’ (*Correio da Manhã*, 31.10.2012)

Public service representatives (municipalities): ‘Our City is a Good Host for Homeless People’ (*Diário das Beiras*, 4.12.2012)

‘DJ Party Helps Centre for Homelessness’ (*Diario Ionline*, 12.03.2012)

Sometimes homeless people are highlighted over other marginalized groups in distress:

“The profile of those who come here is varied; there are drug addicts and homeless people”, showing how institutions themselves discriminate in highlighting the favours being done for these people: “we give them what we happen to have here. For example, today, there is yoghurt” (*Jornal de Noticias*, 22.10.2009).

It is also noteworthy that the photos and text highlight the differences between the group of vulnerable people and the group of technical and smiling volunteers, gratified by their good deed: “almost a thousand disadvantaged people passed through to the sound of a musical band as dinner was served by highly motivated and effective volunteers.” In the article, ‘Minister Served Dinner to the Poor and Homeless’, the Minister, “Questioned about what she saw in the eyes of those who served, refers to ‘joy and sweetness’, saying that it is very rewarding as a human being, because people are not alien to what we are doing” (*Jornal de Noticias*, 21.12.2009). This kind of self-gratification appears in most articles about volunteers – the chance to feel like better people, regardless of what subsequently happens to the people they are helping. The act of generosity is what seems to motivate the practice and articles about charity events may function as a means of motivation and improvement of self-esteem, or as an element of personal development.

'Piece 'Music for Homeless People' Showing Today at Teatro José Lúcio da Silva' (Região de Leiria, 21.12.2010)

'Exhibition in Solidarity with Homeless People' (DN Portugal, 24.09.2010)

'Theatre D. Maria II Gives Tickets to Those who Bring Food for The Homeless' (TVI24, 22.01.2013)

Another example of the instrumentalisation of homeless people to achieve other aims appears in the article 'Modern Pentathlon Club Helps the Homeless': "Sport is not limited to training athletes, it also involves an obligation to train young people for that awaits them in life and this is a reality that we cannot and must not turn our back on." (Jornal das Caldas, 30.12.2009) and other articles:

'Hostel Supports Homeless People and Invites Guests to Contribute' (22.10.2012)

'Homeless Person Presents Weather on TV' (DN Portugal, 31.01.2013)

## Conclusions

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The analysis of the Portuguese press online shows that it gives regular attention to homeless people and to their needs and vulnerabilities in terms of themes and protagonists in various journalistic genres. In terms of the journalistic approach to homelessness, there were no significant differences in the number of news articles, their regularity, or in the variables analysed. However, some differences were found in the depth of treatment of the themes. Despite the diversity of papers considered by this analysis, there were no remarkable variations in journalistic approaches. On the contrary, many of the news articles, even when they seem to use homeless people as their protagonists, tend to convey the reality through the eyes of others (politicians, volunteers, institutions, technical officers), thus reaffirming the role of the media, both in the "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and in the transmission and expansion of social representations. It can be said that newspapers followed the homelessness issue with remarkable regularity during the period of analysis (2009-2013).

It was further observed that studies and scientific/academic research on homelessness are rarely referenced in the news. The most frequent articles on studies relate to counts/censuses of homeless people. As regards the words used to describe homeless people, neutral descriptions were found to be more prevalent than negative or positive statements.

On the other hand, organisations working with homeless people seem to promote themselves through news articles consisting of short interviews with directors or other professionals advocating the quality of its activities and the provision thereof.

Each one considers itself to be the best provider of support to homeless people and it use news articles to describe its activities, request donations and recruit volunteers. It also promotes its identity and corporate image in this way.

Such organisations are generally positioned some distance from homeless people; people are indiscriminately and homogenously grouped as homeless, and the homeless person is referred to as being in a subordinate position – their voice is rarely heard, or heard only through the filter of the institution. The phenomenon of ‘othering’ was quite evident in the articles, as was the commodification of people, where these are made objects or instruments for the purpose of staff training, leadership or recognition. These phenomena represent more than just the language of journalists; rather the institutions themselves, through the voice of their leaders or professionals, reinforce the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

In summary, and to answer the main research questions (namely: what happened in the press in the period 2009-2013? and; Were there any changes, during this period, in the way that homeless people are referred to in the news?) it can be said that between 2009 and 2013, there were enough increases in news articles about homeless people that two coexisting profiles simultaneously emerged: homeless people with low skills and low levels of education and homeless people with significant skills and education levels/graduates. Despite the various institutions whose work focuses on this area of intervention and despite the existence of ENIPSA (the first Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness), a number of articles in 2011 and 2013 reference the worsening of the homelessness situation as a result of the socio-economic crisis, unemployment, austerity measures and decreased investment in social policies. The analysis also shows that homeless people are ‘used’ by specific professional groups as a way to promote themselves, including: police, army, doctors, artists, football players, journalists, politicians and public servants. It further demonstrates a clear and growing revival of values related to charity and welfare in the dominant ideology and increased articles about volunteers. Finally, there is no evidence of news articles reporting on successful stories and/or improvements in the living conditions of homeless people.

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