



European Observatory on Homelessness

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The Governance of Homelessness

**Importance of research to provide the evidence for homelessness policies:
Reflections on Homelessness Research in Europe**

by

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with

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1 Introduction

This paper has three main objectives

- To outline the key developments in the EOH over the last decade
- To describe some of the key issues addressed by EOH publications that have a bearing upon the theme of this conference – **governance of homelessness** and to reflect upon the issues that face Europe at this time in relation to the development of policies on homelessness
- To reflect upon the priorities for improving the research capacity across Europe to feed into evidence based policies.

2 History (Contribution) of the European Observatory

During the last decade the Observatory has operated in a context of the introduction of the European Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion following the Lisbon summit and the enlargement of the Union from the EU-15 to the EU-25 (now EU-27).

The introduction of the Social Exclusion strategy provided some stability to the FEANTSA work programme, under which the Observatory is funded, and recognised homelessness as a key objective of EU policy. On the other hand, the enlargement of Europe with the accession of ten new member states introduced new challenges to the focus of the work as well as new management issues to facilitate the co-ordination of a coherent research programme.

2.1 *Phases in the development of the EOH*

Three broad phases of change / development in the approach to the co-ordination and output of the Observatory can be described. These phases are outlined in Table 1 below in summary. This encapsulates the three distinct trends in approach:

1. The first phase focussed on understanding the nature and causes of homelessness and focussed on specific themes chosen on the basis of the interest of the membership of FEANTSA. *A number of issues of concern were evident. First was the selection of a theme that could be examined in detail in all countries which had equal relevance across Europe. The output of the work involved the production of an annual book and 15 national reports. Dissemination of this output to diverse readership at European and national levels was a challenge.*
2. The second phase followed the emergence of the Social Exclusion Strategy and aimed to shift the focus to strategies and policies of intervention. The organisation of the work changed to include three Working Groups (five countries in each group increasing to seven or eight). In addition, the

Observatory introduced annual updates or reviews of – statistics, policy and research. *This phase coincided with the enlargement of Europe. The key challenges involved managing a standard of quality output and a heavy workload for correspondents many of whom were new to the work of the Observatory.*

3. The third phase began in 2007 in which the key output is the European Journal of Homelessness. The Journal targets a diverse readership (policy, practice, research and academic) with a structure to provide detailed articles, policy evaluation and think pieces. It also aims to give wider European visibility to national research publications. *The challenge in this phase is to ensure a geographic balance of contribution at a relevant / acceptable academic standard for a refereed journal while ensuring accessibility to its diverse audience. The administrative and financial challenges of an Observatory comprised of members from the enlarged EU led to a revision of the membership structure. The Observatory now consists of a team of three co-ordinators and nine members representing a geographic balance of Europe.*

Table 1 Phases in the Development of the European Observatory on Homelessness during the last decade

Period	Theme	Output	Issues
1998 - 2001	Description of Homelessness: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Innovation and service provision 2. Women and homelessness 3. Support in Housing 4. Access to Housing 5. Immigration and homelessness 	European Report and National Reports	Coherent and relevant theme for all countries Descriptive Limited comparative approach Dissemination
2002 - 2006	Intervention Strategies	Working Groups Reports on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Role of the State 2. Profiling Homelessness 3. Service Provision Annual Updates on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of Statistics 2. Policy Review 3. Research Reviews 	Heavy workload Large membership Managing Quality Dissemination
2007 - present	2007: Quality and standards of Services 2008: Effectiveness of Services and Policies 2009: Governance of homelessness	European Journal of Homelessness	Diverse readership Diverse research experience

NOTE: Annual Research Conference began in 2005 and has developed since then from exchange sharing between Observatory members into a European / International Conference on Homelessness

Reflections

1. Homelessness research is not well developed in all countries
2. Difficulty of comparative research in this context without primary research
3. Role of FEANTSA / Observatory in stimulating promoting research is important
4. What are the relevant disciplines to represent in the Observatory and are these changing – housing, social work, social policy, sociology, economics, geography etc?
5. Management task to provide basis and funding for some primary research
6. Development of the Observatory as a research network independent of the annual publication – importance also of the conference.

2.2 *Definition of Homelessness – ETHOS Typology*

An important contribution of the Observatory has been the development of a European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion – now well known as ETHOS.

This approach identifies three domains which constitute a home, the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness. Having a home can be understood as: having a decent dwelling (or space) adequate to meet the needs of the person and his/her family (*physical domain*); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy social relations (*social domain*) and having exclusive possession, security of occupation and legal title (*legal domain*).

These three domains of homelessness (see Figure 1) visualise seven theoretical types of homelessness and housing exclusion (see Table 2), varying between rough sleeping on the one side and living within a decent and legally occupied dwelling without safety (e.g. women who experience domestic abuse) on the other side. These are explained in the *Third Review of Homeless Statistics* (Edgar et al, 2004) and form the basis of the ETHOS typology of homelessness (see Table 3). This conception of homelessness provides a basis for understanding the differences in nomenclature and understanding between countries so that the operational categories provide generic definitions that will allow application to different national contexts.

The FEANTSA ETHOS typology includes homelessness and housing exclusion. Hence homelessness is defined primarily as the roofless and houseless concepts which are operationally defined in seven main categories. However, the definition recognises that legislation in some countries identifies some situations of insecure housing (e.g. illegal occupation of land) and situations of inadequate housing (e.g. occupying mobile homes) as homeless. The documentation also recognises that in a number of countries, for policy purposes, people leaving institutions within a defined period and people with enforced eviction orders are regarded as homeless even though they are no ex post homeless. Finally, the definition of the operational categories recognises the difficulty of treating as

homeless people living in supported housing for homeless people for more than a transitional period (Edgar and Meert, 2005).

While elements of the typology can be and still are debated, the conceptual model and the development into operational categories provide a basis for a structured approach to developing national strategies and data collection. The typology is important conceptually in placing homelessness in a broader social and housing market context than rooflessness. Further, it is based on a pathways model of homelessness and thus stresses the process aspect of homelessness. In this way it is consistent with an approach which aims to mainstream the issue of homelessness in policy.

Ethos has been influential in a number of countries where the definition of homelessness has been developed and in the context of developing national strategies on homelessness. It has also been well received by service providers. The typology has been translated into all EU languages and this in itself has led to interesting discussion about the meaning of key terms.

ETHOS has been referred to and presented in different types of **reports** including in the Italian official contribution for the NAPincl 2006-2008 ([IT](#)), in the European Commission evaluation report on the Open Method of Coordination ([EN](#)), in FEANTSA member annual reports such as in the Brussels member AMA, in research papers such as one produced by the Norwegian Building Research Institute ([NO](#)), in a US paper on homelessness on a global scale ([EN](#)), in a transnational report on institutional support for people experiencing homelessness "Assisted Living" prepared by the ESF/EQUAL Partnership [HOME@WORK](#) ([EN](#)), and a host of other publications.

Figure 1 The Domains of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

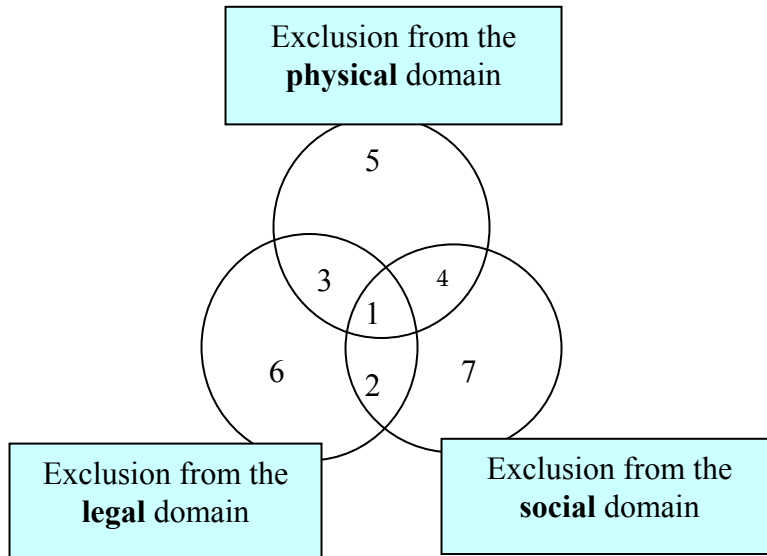


Table 2 Seven theoretical domains of homelessness

		Conceptual Category	Physical Domain	Legal Domain	Social Domain
<i>Homelessness</i>	1	Rooflessness	No dwelling (roof)	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession	No private and safe personal space for social relations
	2	Houselessness	Has a place to live, fit for habitation	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession	No private and safe personal space for social relations
<i>Housing exclusion</i>	3	Insecure and Inadequate housing	Has a place to live (not secure and unfit for habitation)	No security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	4	Inadequate housing and social isolation within a legally occupied dwelling	Inadequate dwelling (unfit for habitation)	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	No private and safe personal space for social relations
	5	Inadequate housing (secure tenure)	Inadequate dwelling (dwelling unfit for habitation)	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	6	Insecure housing (adequate housing)	Has a place to live	No security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	7	Social isolation within a secure and adequate context	Has a place to live	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	No private and safe personal space for social relations

**Table 3.
Exclusion**

ETHOS - European Typology on Homelessness and Housing

Conceptual Category		Operational Category		Generic Definition
ROOFLESS	1	People Living Rough	1.1	Rough Sleeping (no access to 24-hour accommodation) / No abode
	2	People staying in a night shelter	2.1	Overnight shelter
HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel
			3.2	Temporary Accommodation
	4	People in Women's Shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation / reception centres (asylum)
			5.2	Migrant workers accommodation
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions
			6.2	Medical institutions
7	People receiving support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for homeless people	
		7.2		
		7.3	Supported accommodation	
		7.4	Transitional accommodation with support	
			Accommodation with support	
INSECURE	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends
			8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy
			8.3	Illegal occupation of building
			8.4	Illegal occupation of land
9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	
		9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)	
10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents of domestic violence	
INADEQUATE	11	People living in temporary / non-standard structures	11.1	Mobile home / caravan
			11.2	Non-standard building
			11.3	Temporary structure
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Unfit for habitation (under national legislation; occupied)
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding

3 Governance and Homelessness

In many respects governance has been a recurring theme of the Observatory's work over the past 10 years. Defined as **'the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented'** [UN ESCAP, 2007], an analysis of governance focuses on:

'.....the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision' (ESCAP, 2007).

Mainly due to Henk Meert's influence we have often employed Polanyi's model to examine the formal and non-formal structures and how these overlap to create differential access to housing or variation in service provision. This has, of course, also influenced our development of the ETHOS typology.

Changing governance

An illustration of the Observatory's engagement with governance issues is provided by the following two paragraphs reproduced from Edgar et al (2002: 223-24)

The changing role of the state is sometimes encapsulated in the term 'hollowing out' (Jessop, 1993). This involves the divesting of state responsibilities 'upwards' to supra-national organisations such as the EU, the 'downward' transfer of responsibilities to local government and quasi-state organisation, and the dispersion 'outwards' to non-state agencies such as NGOs and the voluntary sector, as well as to private, for-profit enterprises. The scale of this hollowing out process varies from country to country and is not, necessarily, linearly cumulative in that the state sometimes claims back powers and responsibilities (Rhodes, 1994). Further, the significance of the hollowing out process is disputed: does it, as some claim, lead to the establishment of a 'shadow state' (Wolch, 1989) whereby, through monitoring and regulation and indeed funding, the state effectively retains control over the intent and direction of these alternative agencies? Or does it represent something altogether more fundamental, the surrender of state power and control, allowing other ideologies, whether of the laissez-faire market or those of civil society, free reign (Bryson et al, 2002)? Both tendencies can be identified across EU member states and indeed in regional variations within individual country.

The retrenchment of the welfare state in EU member countries over the course of the last few decades, provides a trenchant manifestation of the hollowing out process as it relates to social policy. Though uneven in its impact, all European societies, under the umbrella of a neo-liberal political ethos, have experienced the sloughing-off of once well defined state responsibilities to the private sector and to the voluntary sector; to the market and to civil society. Hollowing out has set in train a reversal of those processes of 'decommodification' and 'defamilialisation'

which Esping-Anderson (1990, 1999) and others (e.g Sainsbury, 1996) used in their fashioning of welfare regime typologies. In relation to housing policy, the retrenchment of the welfare state is apparent in two tendencies. First, in the curtailment of ‘bricks and mortar’ subsidies to non-state providers of subsidised housing and the curbing of expenditure on benefit payments to vulnerable households. Secondly, retrenchment has been apparent in the withdrawal of the state from the direct provision of social housing. The overall impact has been, on the one hand, to boost market involvement in providing access to housing and, on the other, to encourage the resurgence of not-for-profit organisations in the form of quasi-state or charitable or voluntary housing agencies

While such ‘macro’ analysis provides some insight into the processes that contribute to the ‘governance of homelessness’, there is a need (as hinted at in the above quotation) also to drill down to the meso- and micro-levels of analysis and understanding; at these levels an *institutional /agency* perspective is perhaps most useful and a fundamental aspect is the recognition of inter-agency and cross-scale interactions/ collaborations as essential in developing both an understanding of homeless in an increasing mobile and interrelated world and, importantly, in developing prevention strategies. .

With reference to homelessness Table 4 illustrates some of these combinations (though it is not comprehensive) taking into account geographic scale of operation.

Table 4: Agency and scale in the governance of homelessness

	State & state/civil society			Market & State/ market		Civil society
	EU	State	NGO	Public/ private	Profit/ not for profit service providers	Voluntary organisations
Local			x	x		x
National/regional		x	x	x		x
Supra-national	x		x	x		x

Much of the past work of the Observatory has focused on the national and sub-national level and has involved an examination of the role of agencies in delivery homeless services at a local level (a theme of one of the Observatory Working Groups in the period 2002-2006).

The UNESCAP (2007) document on governance identifies 8 major characteristics which contribute to good governance at an institutional/ agency level. These are (i) participation, (2) consensus orientation, (3) accountability, (4) transparency, (5) responsiveness, (6) effectiveness and efficiency, (7) equity and inclusiveness and (8) the rule of law. The recently developed FEANTSA Participation Toolkit (2007) deals directly with the first of these and indirectly with several of the others.

4 Reflections

From the above discussion it should be clear that good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Very few countries and societies have come close to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.

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