The Role of Hostels and Temporary Accommodation

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› **Abstract**_ *The provision of hostel accommodation for those who are homeless has a long history. Despite the fact that their functions and consequences are often questioned, hostels remain a basic element in the provision of services for those who are homeless in all European countries. The aim of this paper is to consider the present-day role of homeless hostels as temporary accommodation, and to discuss its qualities in an "ideal" situation. We do this through presenting and discussing the main functions allegedly served by the hostel, as well as its inherent and associated problems. Following a brief review of housing-led approaches to reduce homelessness, we suggest minimum requirements concerning security of tenure, standard and support if a decent quality of existing and future hostels is to be ensured. Our conclusion is that the reasons for hostels boil down to a need for physical shelter in emergency and transition situations where self-contained dwellings and regular hotels are unavailable or deficient. However, an organised provision of mainstream housing, let with security of tenure and coupled with support when requested by the residents is the only working solution to homelessness and would also minimise the need for homeless hostels.*

› **Key Words**_ *hostels, shelters, temporary accommodation, homeless accommodation, security of tenure*

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Introduction

Hostels are perhaps the oldest institution for homeless people, existent long before there were any explicit policies to mitigate and resolve homelessness. They emerged as a response to some effects of industrialisation and urbanisation in the 19th century. Domestic migration increased as landless and unemployed people moved to the cities to look for work, and hostels of various kinds, run by private landlords, philanthropic societies or towns and cities became a common solution to homelessness, especially in periods of economic recession and failed harvests (Anderson, 1923). Homelessness was extensive during the Great Depression in the 1930s, and after World War II, but in the subsequent decades it was to a growing extent perceived as a residual problem in a developing welfare state, and many shelters were closed. However, in response to increased rough-sleeping following, for example, the neo-liberal shift in the US and the UK in the 1970s, the transition of Central and East European countries in the 1990s and local and national strains and constraints elsewhere, hostels of varying standard, quality and size have been established again all over Europe.

However, the nature, purpose, access and physical form of hostels and temporary accommodation for the homeless differ between countries and have been changing over time. In some countries and cities overnight shelters, homeless hostels for single people and temporary accommodation for families form spatially distinct forms of provision; elsewhere different functions are contained in the same building. In some countries municipalities are obliged to provide temporary accommodation; in other countries no such duty is acknowledged.[1] In most European countries third sector organisations (NGOs), especially faith based charities, play an important role in running hostels and other types of temporary accommodation, but here, too, there is variation across countries and over time.

In many countries the perception of the role and value of hostels and temporary accommodation has been changing. Often the development of large shelters with very basic conditions was (and still is) legitimised by the fact that many people are in desperate need for physical shelter, while setting up smaller hostels allowing more privacy and more individualised support has been presented as an improvement. However, both forms of provision may co-exist as part of a staircase system or a "continuum of care" and provide the basis for differentiating between deserving and undeserving homeless people.

The hostel sector has been criticised as becoming increasingly institutionalized and having developed into an organisational barrier, rather than an instrument to remedying and reducing homelessness (see Stark, 1994; Gerstel *et al.*, 1996;

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1 But see Kenna (2006) and Helenelund (2007) on UN's convention on human rights.

Sahlin 1998, 2005). We will discuss a number of reasons why hostels are established as well as arguments against this kind of institution. The necessary conditions to reduce the need for them will be outlined. We question whether, as policies shift towards a 'housing first' approach, there will still be a role for the hostel. In a policy framework aiming at preventing homelessness from occurring and aiming at a reduction of the length of time people spend as homeless, which groups and circumstances, if any, will still give reason for an organised provision of temporary accommodation? What qualitative standards would then have to be applied?

After two short sections on the definition of temporary accommodation and hostels and of their development over time, we present and discuss some arguments for and against hostels. Although the literature available to us does not suffice for a "European overview", we provide examples from different countries[2] and present arguments that are more or less applicable in many places. The following parts of our paper concern policies emphasising housing provision instead of temporary accommodation and the possible remaining role (and minimum standards) of hostels in an "ideal" system. Finally the arguments are summarised in a concluding discussion.

What are we talking about? How to define Hostels and Temporary Accommodation for Homeless People

Edgar & Meert (2005, p. 22) note that "in no country is there a clear or agreed definition of a homeless hostel" and that it is difficult to distinguish hostel dwellers from homeless people living in other types of temporary accommodation. In line with their conceptual model of defining homelessness as exclusion from the physical, legal and social domain, they propose the following characteristics of "homeless accommodation":

[2] Being the authors' home countries, Germany and Sweden will be over represented. In both countries – with more or less developed welfare provision in place – a radical reduction of places in hostels for homeless people seems achievable, while colleagues in other parts of Europe find such a vision "utopian" and unrealistic in their countries.

Table 1_ Generic description of characteristics of homeless accommodation (as proposed by Edgar & Meert 2005)

Physical space	Communal in form (normally larger than normal dwelling). Shared space (living, eating and/or food preparation).
Social space	Staff supervision on premises. Limited (or no) private space (i. e. from which others can be excluded).
Legal space	Temporary occupancy No tenancy or occupancy agreement. Exclusion (eviction) without court action.

Source: Edgar & Meert 2005, p. 22

Some elements of this definition are open to debate (e. g. the criterion of size). While it is true that hostels are mostly larger than normal residential dwellings (and some may have more than 100 beds), homeless accommodation is also provided in residential dwellings shared by only very few persons, but with the same social and legal restrictions in place.

Hostels are distinguished from other temporary accommodation not least through limited private space. Especially in overnight shelters, several people often sleep in the same room. Space for cooking and eating is usually communal, and shared space may also include sanitary facilities (bath/toilets).

Most temporary accommodation will have some staff supervision, but its level is variable. In some hostels there are ambulatory support visits by social / care workers or other specific staff, but these will be present only at daytime, or at certain hours. In other hostels, security guards make regular visits to monitor the residents, but social service supports are generally only available off-site.

As a general rule, homeless hostels are intended for temporary occupancy, but in reality people may stay much longer than anticipated. On the other hand, the classification of long-term accommodation of people with special needs, for example elderly frail persons, as homeless accommodation does not adequately reflect the nature of the service provision. On this basis, Edgar *et al.* (2007, p. 81) recommend that we focus on "the intended length of stay rather than the actual average length of stay" when classifying homeless accommodation.

Homeless people usually have by definition no tenancy rights. Some kind of contract may be signed for temporary accommodation, but usually the rights of occupants in hostels are severely restricted and considerably weaker than in a regular tenancy in, for example, the private rented sector. Communal living often implies additional prescriptions in the occupancy agreement and complying with such rules, as well

as accepting social support and staff supervision, are frequent preconditions for staying in a hostel.

"Institutional control of access" is a common element for organised homeless accommodation; the staff may decide who gains admittance in short-term shelters with "direct access", while a reference agency may select residents in other hostels, but the hostel residents themselves are rarely, if ever, allowed to determine who will be accommodated with them.

On the basis of this discussion, we suggest that the characteristics of a hostel as described by Edgar and Meert (2005) be slightly amended as shown in table 2.

Table 2_ Generic description of characteristics of hostel (as amended by the authors of this article)

Physical space	Communal in form (*mostly, but not always* larger than normal dwelling). Shared space (living, eating, food preparation *and/or bath/toilet*).
Social space	*Some kind of* supervision. Limited (or no) private space (i. e. from which others can be excluded).
Legal space	*Institutional control of access* Temporary occupancy *intended* No *regular* tenancy agreement Exclusion (eviction) without court action.

Several attempts have been made to set apart hostels from other types of temporary accommodation, such as specialised shelters or supported or transitional housing. But problems of ambiguous or overlapping definitions are common even in one country (e. g. Rosengard *et al.,* 2001, p. 27) and at a European level the situation becomes even more complicated. Edgar and Meert (2005, p. 23) propose to differentiate homeless accommodation by referring to access criteria, intended period of stay and purpose/intention. But as the authors point out, the different types are difficult to identify in practice. This is because they often serve different purposes at the same time, the length of stay is longer than initially planned, or different parts of the same institution have different purposes, target groups and periods of stay. Furthermore in the EU 15 the differentiation follows disparate types of logic:

> "In some countries there is a clear separation between emergency provision and other forms of a hostel (for reception, assessment, transitional living or temporary accommodation), while in other countries there is more of a continuum of provision. In some countries (e. g. Denmark) this

> division is a reflection of social service provision; in other countries (e. g. France) it is more a reflection of funding; and elsewhere it is a reflection of the structure of the (confessional and non-confessional) historical sources of provision (e. g. Portugal, Belgium). " (Egdar & Meert 2005, p. 24).

For the purpose of this article, we propose to adopt the definition of a hostel as outlined in table 2, although the degree to which the definition is relevant in part depends on a country's specific composition of accommodation supply, housing market, service provision and unmet needs. We understand "shelter" as a somewhat less specified concept but use it sometimes as a synonym. In addition, we at times mention temporary accommodation of other kinds, such as transitional housing in self-contained dwellings, but without tenancy rights and/or without power to exclude supervising staff from it.

The Development of Hostel Provision in Europe

Basic temporary accommodation has often been legitimized by the sheer need of desperate people for physical shelter. There are still a number of European countries – including the relatively "young" Eastern European member states – where homeless people have problems finding any form of physical shelter and where no legal responsibilities exist to provide such shelter. The existence of poor standards of temporary accommodation (the use of derelict buildings or barracks, large dormitories, closed premises at day time, personnel without training and often even without paid wages etc.) in such situations are often due to a lack of resources and conceived as a provisional response to an urgent but temporary problem.

Very often temporary accommodation functions as a substitute for permanent housing, either because of housing shortage or because homeless people are excluded from regular housing. However, there has been a trend in many European countries to develop hostels, not only to provide a basic accommodation, but also to serve needs for care and support. The de-institutionalisation of patients from mental health facilities from the 1970s onwards and the critique of large scale institutions, also had some impact on the development of hostels and support in housing for homeless people (see also Edgar *et al.,* 2000, 33ff). Large scale hostels with dormitories are in many countries seen as outmoded and have increasingly been replaced by smaller units that claim to be more oriented towards the individual needs of the users and towards respecting a certain minimum of privacy and autonomy (although both privacy and autonomy remain restricted by definition in temporary accommodation for the homeless). In a number of countries we find an increased share of single rooms and of support concepts aiming at empowerment and reintegration into regular housing. The call for more individualised support has

led to an increase of hostels targeting specific client groups such as young people (for whom accommodation is sometimes integrated with employment and social support as in the "foyers" in the UK), single mothers, women, persons released from prisons, HIV-patients, people with addiction problems and double diagnoses (mental illness and substance abuse problems). However, the trend from more generalist to more specialist provision has also led to tighter control and conditioning of access to such provision.

In many places new types of hostels have not only replaced old and more institutionalized kinds of temporary accommodation, but also non-institutional provision like hotels, low cost but substandard housing and hostels for itinerant workers. [3] In Scotland a rationale for opening new hostels in the 1990s by local authorities was "to reduce their reliance on bed and breakfast for accommodating homeless people" (Rosengard *et al*. 2001, p. 14). The development of homeless hostels to replace commercial tourist hotels that were being used as accommodation for homeless people can also be observed elsewhere (e. g. in Germany and Sweden).

While the general trend towards smaller scale hostels can be confirmed for countries like the UK (see May *et al*, 2006, p. 721) and Germany, we still find large scale homeless hostels in a number of European cities. In Madrid a new shelter for the homeless with 120 places opened in May 2007 and in Paris the largest hostel (in the 13th Arrondissement) has 450 bed spaces. A new plan for developing temporary accommodation in Paris defines a maximum of 50 bed spaces as a maximum "human" size (de Brunhoff, 2007). It should be noted that sometimes several smaller hostel units can be located in the same building, which may imply that the organisation but not the physical image of a large shelter is down-scaled through internal differentiation.

In several European countries the number of direct access overnight-shelters, which have to be vacated during daytime, appears to be in decline. A shift away from basic crisis intervention has been stated as a European trend (Meert 2005, p. 26). However, in a number of cities in the UK, Germany, Sweden and France new types of "winter shelters" have opened in recent years, some of which provide very basic shelter and are closed during the day as well as in summer time. One of the main justifications in favour of such shelters is that some homeless people are deterred or excluded by the regulations of "better" types of hostels and would otherwise freeze to death in the winter. Often such "low threshold" accommodation

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3 The four largest hostels of Glasgow City Council, each with approximately 250 beds "were built in the 1970's, initially aiming to cater for itinerant workers, but then becoming a key resource in the response to increasing homelessness amongst single people" (Rosengard et al. 2001). In the meantime they have been closed (see Fitzpatrick & Wygnanski in this volume).

is seen as an equivalent to "low standard"- accommodation, so that in these cases shared bedrooms and less privacy (or none at all) is seen as legitimate.

An important reason for the creation of new hostels and shelters has been the uneven distribution of those which already exist. They are often concentrated in the largest cities of the country while smaller municipalities and rural counties with no or little provision of hostel places are blamed for "exporting" their homeless people to the large cities.[4]

While in a number of countries there is a relatively strict division between provision for single people and for families, this is not the case in others. In Germany, municipalities traditionally provided homeless families with temporary accommodation – often in substandard flats in specific "homeless estates"– while NGO-services provided for the majority of homeless single persons. In recent years the number of homeless families has decreased substantially in some countries and cities, and there are cities in Germany claiming to have reduced family homelessness to zero. Many of the municipal facilities for homeless people have been demolished or upgraded into regular, permanent housing and the share of single homeless people in the remaining units has increased accordingly. Low numbers of homeless families are also reported in Finland. Both examples show that it is possible to almost eliminate the need for temporary accommodation – at least for families – and to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place.

Hostel problematics

Despite tendencies to down-scale and differentiate the sector, hostels are found all over Europe and remain a key response to homelessness in many countries. In this part of the paper we will attempt to explain why the hostel remains central to both the construction of homelessness and its solution, but also why it is still problematic. Not only do hostels fail to serve many of the functions they allegedly serve, but they may also have side effects that are detrimental for homeless people, particularly in terms of exiting homelessness.

Hostel functions

The actual reasons why hostels open, are maintained or reappear as a solution to homelessness are found in both the policy context and traditions. Applying new institutionalism theories, Knutagård and Nordfeldt (2007) claim that hostels tend to re-open in situations when a confluence of problems, solutions and political troubles

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4 See May, Cloke & Johnsen (2006) on the "uneven distribution" of emergency accommodation in Britain and Brunhof (2007) on the concentration of hostel places in Paris. Similar problems are reported by Cabrera in Spain.

emerge, such as when news media report on increased rough-sleeping, when local charity NGOs are looking for a visible task to fulfil (or for project funding)[5] and politicians and local authorities are urged to "do something" now. Hostels are frequently conceived as a "last resort" in combating homelessness, and hence they are not compared to alternative accommodation or regular housing but viewed as the only possible, hence "necessary", solution in a crisis situation (Emerson, 1981).

Once in place, hostels appear to fulfil a number of functions which contribute to their reproduction. The following items are extracted from ad hoc observations of recent local policy discussion, historical accounts as well as research:

1. Hostels satisfy emergency needs for a bed, a roof and a place to stay (including temporary accommodation while waiting for regular housing): *provide (physical) shelter.*

2. The time period spent in the hostel can be used for investigating and working with the homeless persons' needs regarding work, financial problems, family relations or other problems that may have contributed to their homelessness and/or provide an obstacle for accessing housing: *preparation for housing.*

3. Hostels facilitate the provision of social support, since the providers know where to find their clients: *support.*[6]

4. In hostels, it is possible to control homeless people (Stark, 1994; Wagner, 2005) in the sense of supervising their behaviour, health and personal contacts in order to protect themselves, their families or their environment: *protection/control.*

5. Homeless people enjoy the company of others and fear loneliness, thus hostels provide a form of *community.*

6. Low quality night shelters make up an "appalling alternative" to other kinds of accommodation, which helps motivate homeless people to qualify, strive, and apply for, or try to remain in, other forms of housing (Sahlin, 1996), hence, they serve a function as *punishment and deterrence.*

7. Some people have repeatedly failed to keep regular housing and are seen as incapable of independent living among ordinary people, for these the hostel may serve as an *end station.*

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5 See Gerstel *et al.,* 1996. In turn, homeless people lining up for overnight shelters and soup kitchens give visible proof of the need for such facilities (and makes clear who supplies them), which might attract volunteers to the NGO in charge and further encourage this kind of solution.

6 For local authorities responsible for homeless people, hostels may also serve as a waiting-room for clients whose future accommodation is unavailable or uncertain (Sahlin 1996).

All or some of these functions are often referred to as arguments for the development of hostels and constitute part of the rationale for the maintenance of such services.

Problematising hostels

We will now provide some arguments against hostels as a solution to homelessness. These will sometimes dispute or question the above-mentioned functions, or highlight unintended side-effects, but at other times functions and drawbacks need to be balanced; this discussion is left to the concluding section. Here, we will point out some general misconceptions in the homelessness discourse, then present dilemmas with the shelter *per se* and in practice, and finally account for problems caused by the policy or market context of the hostel.

General misconceptions. Several misunderstandings of the nature of homelessness need to be addressed. Our first point is that the causes of *becoming* homeless are not necessarily the reasons for *remaining* homeless (see, for example, Rossi, 1989). Even if the problems that caused the loss of a previous home were indeed solved while in the hostel (or even due to the stay there), the prerequisites for getting access to a new home may be somewhat different. For instance, the loss of a home may be due to divorce, but being single is not *per se* a hindrance to getting a new home. Conversely, being unemployed does not put your lease at risk as long as you are able to pay the rent but can make it hard to be accepted by a new landlord.

Secondly, it follows from the previous paragraph that the transition period can become much longer than it takes to prepare the homeless individual for a new settled period. Hence, the fact that people are homeless does not reflect that they are not "housing ready".

Thirdly, staying in a hostel requires a special competence which is quite different from living independently. Whether or not people behave well in hostels has very little to do with their capacity and capability to manage in a self-contained dwelling, with tenure security and regular social space (Busch-Geertsema, 1998).

Fourth and finally, the fact that a number of people stay in hostels does not logically imply that they would otherwise be sleeping rough or that the rough-sleeping population is reduced. We will come back to this issue; suffice here to state that the existence of hostels can in fact aggravate the situation of homeless people and increase their number (Sahlin, 1998, 2006).

Accordingly, while the immediate cause of becoming homeless may indeed have been an individual problem, the way back to the housing market is highly dependent on the situation of the market and the prevailing housing and social policy; preparation for housing may not be necessary or even possible in hostels; and these may have perverse and contra-productive effects. We will expand on some of these

counter-arguments through focusing on the communal living, the institution as a problem, and the market and policy context in which hostels are caught.

The problem of sharing. Hostels where the residents share some space, for instance, the bathroom or the kitchen, will be at risk of in-house conflicts to a much higher extent than in homes that are self-contained or where the residents have agreed to share space and equipment on the basis of friendship or family relations. There is no reason to believe that hostel residents selected by social workers or other social service personnel will develop close relations just because they happen to be put in the same flat or institution. In addition, lack of social space makes it difficult for residents to maintain contact – or build up new relationships – with people *outside* the hostel. The possibilities for reintegration are further reduced if the residents are subjected to rules stating that they must be in at a given time in the evening or must not have guests (Stark, 1994).

Many people have more or less articulated difficulties with being close to other people and being forced to interact with them. Having to share living-room or bedroom with unknown others is often seen as a necessary evil for a limited period of time, as in hospital care, but few housed people want the company of strangers at breakfast or in front of the TV, and even less so in the bathroom or where they spend the night. Still, it is often claimed by those running and funding shelters that homeless people benefit from such involuntary company.

The downside of institutions. Institutions have a long tradition within medical care and treatment, as well as within care provisions for people who are elderly or who, because of learning difficulties or other disabilities, are unable to take care of themselves. Besides special physical arrangements, the advantage for the residents consists in immediate and continuous access to services, care and staff. Institutions are also a key component within the criminal justice system, where a key function of incarceration is to ensure relentless control and surveillance.

Since the 1970s, institutions have been under severe criticism for being inhumane, expensive and ineffective. As a consequence, the provision of care for the elderly, those disabled and diseased is to a growing extent de-institutionalised. Although the number of prisoners has grown in absolute and relative terms in many European countries over the last decades, their share of all convicted people has also decreased in some countries as a result of new forms of punishment, such as electronic surveillance.

While the categories of people who were previously institutionalised are to an increasing extent taken care of in their own homes or in small-scale units where they themselves can influence house rules and have their own private space, new institutions have emerged for other categories of people since the 1970s (Sahlin,

2004). These include women fleeing violent husbands, asylum-seekers and newly arrived refugees who are, in the main, accommodated in special reception centres which have many of the traits of an institution. A further group is homeless people accommodated in various kinds of shelters and hostels. However, none of these three categories of people is offered special services that such arrangements would facilitate. On the contrary, they are mostly physically fit and capable of cooking and cleaning for themselves – and expected to do so. The reason for offering them places in institutions instead of regular homes is not to provide service and care, but rather protection and control (Wagner, 2005).

Regardless of their purpose, "total institutions" tend to have certain perverse consequences for their residents. Instead of learning how to cope in society outside, inmates have to struggle to defend their identity and adapt to their role as, in this case, shelter residents (Stark 1994). They spend much energy on either primary adaptation (to learn and to comply with the rules of the institution) or secondary adaptation (i. e. to learn to act *as if* they had conformed to the programme and house rules as a way of preserving their self-identity and privacy; Goffman, 1961/1991). Even though overnight shelters hardly qualify as total institutions (Marcus, 2003), many specialised hostels do, especially if they are targeting substance abuse (Snow & Andersen, 1993, p. 228).

In an institution, there is always a contradiction between the requirements of rational provision of service and control, and the inmates' or service users' demand on privacy and influence over the provisions to make them fit with their own needs and preferences (Stark, 1994). Several factors make it especially hard for homeless hostel residents to affect how support and services are organised. First, homeless people are always poor and have no resourceful next-of-kin demanding high quality services and institutions on their behalf. Rising hostel standards and quality would also not gain votes for politicians. Second, unlike the situation for people in need of institutional living because of severe diseases or disabilities, homeless hostels are always *intended* to be temporary accommodation (Wagner, 2005). Third, hostels are often embedded in a system of sanctions, such as a staircase of transition, which tend to need a lowest rung to intimidate or motivate residents elsewhere to behave where they are. To keep that inferior status implies that hostels should not be too comfortable or nice, as people should be motivated to work for other solutions (Sahlin, 2005). Fourth and finally, where people stay because of homelessness, the staff will be oriented towards control more than services. As a result of this, and as the residents mostly have no other options, hostels tend to be much less open for users' influence than other kinds of institution.

Market and policy context

The problematics of the hostel are frequently reflected in, and reinforced by the market context and the policy systems in which it is embedded. We want to highlight a few important mechanisms in society that in the final instance make the hostel less functional than it has potential to be.

Reactions with other housing market actors. Part of the hostel problem stems from the way the housing market works. When landlords know that if they reject or expel tenants, these will be offered some temporary accommodation by NGOs or the municipality, this fact may facilitate evictions and make it easier to reject housing applicants even if there are vacant flats available. In addition, staying in a hostel will probably reduce the chances of being accepted when applying for a flat. Landlords require "housing references" confirming that the applicant is of 'good character', and staying in a hostel may be interpreted as an indication of the opposite. Hostels often have a negative reputation, either because some people staying there are indeed misbehaving (or were known to be misbehaving before they got there), which may stain the image of the whole hostel (cf. Elias & Scotson, 1965/1994), or due to lasting prejudice. Hence, the mere address will often lead to suspicions.

The existence of a hostel will also produce a conception of who is fit to stay in it – and, hence (so to speak) not fit for regular housing. In the same way as the existence of super-secure prisons will give rise to an image of its inmates as especially dangerous criminals, special housing for people considered in need for training and surveillance creates a perception of its residents as incapable of regular housing.

Hostels may also suffer from historical disrepute (Knutagård & Nordfeldt, 2007). As long as the idea prevails that some people cannot live amongst "normal people", settled residents will be appalled by the idea that a hostel may be located "in my backyard". NIMBY-ism not only makes it hard to find sites for new hostels (Oakley, 2002) but also entails the production and distribution of forceful arguments against it, including speculation about what kind of people will be staying there and the damage they will cause the neighbourhood. The counter-argument by planners and service providers is often that hostels are the only possible solution to alleviating street homelessness, implying again that homeless people are not fit for regular housing. The construction of such images of the homeless as either wretched or villains (Runquist, 2007) reinforces prevailing popular ideas that homeless people are of a different, inferior kind – "not like us".

The hostel as the bottom rung in a staircase. An important part of the policy context is existing homelessness policies and their understanding of the role of hostels. The "staircase of transition" – developed in Sweden in the 1990s but akin to other conceptions of housing careers for homeless people, such as "continuum of care" in the US – serves as a justification of low-quality hostels and a differentiated supply of accommodation.

The idea of a staircase of transition is that temporary housing with different levels of standard and control are organised like a ladder or a staircase, comprising a number of steps or rungs for the homeless client to climb up, ultimately exiting from homelessness through acquiring a flat with regular leasehold. The assumption is that the client be trained in independent living and gradually qualify for regular housing. However, the flip side of this use of standards and freedom as a reward for good behaviour is that the individual who does not "improve" is stuck on a rung, while the one who misbehaves is either degraded to a lower step or pushed down to the bottom floor, often a night shelter, as a punishment (Sahlin, 2005). Since more people are being evicted or transferred to lower steps in the staircase, than upgraded to higher steps, and as there is a continuous flow of new homeless people who failed to get regular housing or were evicted from ordinary dwellings, the local staircase typically tends to expand on the lower rungs, while the top steps make up a bottleneck.

A quantitative study in Sweden showed that the number of people in the secondary housing market and the number of homeless people sleeping rough or in hostels are significantly positively related, when different years or different municipalities are compared. These results remain significant when the size of the municipality and the local housing market are controlled, that is, they cannot be explained by the number of people living in the municipality, nor by the local vacancy rate in public housing. Furthermore, the higher the share of the local population in homeless accommodation, the higher was the proportion literally homeless five years later (Sahlin, 2006). Qualitative studies in Swedish cities support these findings (Löfstrand, 2005; Runquist, 2007).

The statistical analysis further demonstrated that the effect of the regular housing market was not what is usually claimed. Where and when the vacancy rate of public housing was high, more special accommodation was found for the homeless, but the proportion of homeless people on the streets and/or in emergency hostels was not reduced. This result from Sweden indicates that the existence of a secondary housing market with homeless accommodation, under certain circumstances, might hamper the normal market mechanism that would reduce the landlords' demands on housing applicants (financially and with regard to their previous "housing merits") (Sahlin, 2006).

The everlasting "temporary" status. Two aspects that tend to legitimate shelters as a solution to homelessness relate to the limited time that they will be used. One aspect was approached above in the discussion of conflating causes of becoming homeless with solutions to homelessness, namely the assumption that each individual will only spend a short time in the hostel. However, there is ample evidence that many people either remain for months or even years in the same shelter, or keep coming back after short intermediate periods of sleeping rough or staying in friends' apartments (Swärd, 1998). The other account claims that the low standard night shelter is only a provisional emergency solution in a period of housing market crisis or while waiting for the production of better accommodation. However, history shows that the night shelter has a long and remarkably consistent history and even if it has sometimes been abandoned, it tends to come back in times of housing crisis (Hopper, 2004; Wagner, 2005; Knutagård & Nordfeldt, 2007); church-based NGOs in particular tend to favour this kind of help to the homeless (see Runquist, 2007; Olsson, 2007).

In brief, many residents stay much longer than intended in hostels that remain in use much longer than anticipated. Although constantly expected to be but provisional, or a residual element of the local homelessness policy, hostels often manage to survive, or return after having been closed, in roughly the same shape for decades or even centuries. Ironically, this survival capacity is actually reinforced by the image of being a temporary solution for the individual as well as the community.

Housing-led Approaches

The hostel idea is currently challenged by housing first approaches in the US and new ways of providing support in housing for ex-homeless people living as long term tenants with full tenancy rights in mainstream housing. Since the 1990s, there have been several attempts to provide housing for homeless people without requiring that they fully prove in advance that they are good tenants or "housing ready". Four examples will be reviewed here: evaluated NGO projects, especially Soziale Wohnraumhilfe in Hannover, Germany, where homeless people in hostels were offered regular housing with support when they wanted; the recent national homelessness policy of the U. S. A, according to which homeless people should be provided with "housing first", then treatment and support; the related Norwegian "normalisation approach" which explicitly favours permanent housing as solution to the homelessness problem; and the Scottish right to housing which is hitherto the only European example of a rights-based approach to ending homelessness.

NGO re-housing projects in Europe

In Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, NGOs have initiated the provision of self-contained housing with full tenancy rights for their clients while offering social support on a voluntary basis if needed. Evaluation of such projects has shown positive results in a number of examples (see Busch-Geertsema, 2005 for projects in Dublin, Milan and Hannover). The "housing factor" and integration into mainstream, self-contained housing with a long-term perspective as regular tenants had an important impact also for single homeless people with additional problems because it helped them to acquire normality, stability, a private sphere and (relative) autonomy. The evaluation also showed the need for flexible and individually tailored support measures for a considerable part of homeless people after re-housing took place. The study of a social rental agency in Hannover (Soziale Wohnraumhilfe) showed that of almost 200 tenancies arranged over a period of ten years for single homeless people with severe social difficulties, around 19 percent ended with a clear negative outcome (notice of eviction, abandonment) while the majority (72 percent) had a positive outcome (i. e. tenants were still living there or had moved to other mainstream dwellings) (Busch-Geertsema, 2002b, p. 29).

Housing First (USA)

The background to this approach in the USA was the consistent research finding that services for the homeless, however well they were designed, failed to reduce homelessness unless housing was provided (Burt, 2005, p. 5). The official definition of "chronic homelessness" according to HUD (US Department of Housing and Urban Development) is, besides having a disability, to be continuously homeless for one year or more or having been homeless at least four times in the past three years.

> "Research provided the first step toward developing today's emphasis on ending chronic homelessness. Early federally-funded demonstrations, showed that very long-term homeless people with many disabilities and problems will come directly into housing and stay there, with appropriate services and supports. Subsequent studies and evaluations have demonstrated the same thing. /… / Finally, financial analyses showed that the public cost of not providing housing and supportive services for this population came very close to equalling the costs of making housing available" (Burt, 2005, p. 10).

Interestingly, and quite unlike the tendency in many European countries, those "chronic homeless", many of whom suffer from double disabilities (mental illness and substance abuse problems) have been prioritised as targets in this approach, which has proven to be reasonably successful. However, Burt (2001, 2005) underlines the importance of preventing homelessness altogether through providing

affordable housing so that people do not become homeless in the first place and so that, if they do, they can return to the regular housing market.

"Normalisation" as governmental approach (Norway)

"Project Homeless" 2000-2004 in Norway, led by the state institution *Husbanken,* and aimed at providing "secure housing for all", involved several local projects. Initially, many towns and cities planned to use the Swedish staircase model. However, due to poor initial results and reflection, the project was reoriented towards a model where permanent housing was to be the standard provision – also for "double diagnosed" homeless people (Dyb, 2005). In addition, the project has funded services and support for homeless people, with a preference for expanding home support or outreach work where support is designed according to the client's subjectively defined needs and not a condition for housing. Despite overall positive results, however, the big cities are still prone to organise special contracts without tenure security and where support is mandatory (Ytrehus *et al.*, 2007, p. 86).

Right to permanent housing (Scotland)

In the UK, several projects have applied a "housing led strategy" to end homelessness. There is also a growing acknowledgement that support sometimes should be financial, in order to enable homeless people to rent dwellings from private landlords. Although homelessness has kept a high position on the political agenda ever since the Housing (Homeless) Act of 1977, underpinned by the Rough Sleeping Initiative 1990–1999 (and similar programs thereafter), the British right to housing is still a good example for many European countries without such entitlements; Scotland has gained a special reputation in this field (Kenna, 2005). The Housing (Scotland) Act (2001) obliges local authorities to provide permanent housing for all unintentionally homeless people with priority need. The scope has been expanded since, to the effect that "priority need" is gradually widened and will vanish 2012, when every homeless person will have a right to permanent housing. Those found to be "intentionally homeless" will be entitled to temporary accommodation with a "short" secure tenancy, and to support meanwhile. After 12 months, the tenancy will be converted into a regular, permanent leasehold. Since local and national authorities now have to supply affordable housing, this legislated vision has caused considerable action, planning and hope in Scotland (Fitzpatrick, 2004), but it remains to be seen whether local authorities will be able to deliver (see Anderson in this volume).

The Possible Role of Hostels in an "Ideal" System

It is increasingly accepted that the vast majority of those experiencing homelessness have the potential to live in long-term housing and sustain a tenancy and that some of them will need social support in order to reach that goal. Surveys among homeless people in a number of countries also show that most prefer living in self-contained flats to staying in shelters, hostels and other types of temporary accommodation. Rosengard *et al*. (2001, p. 43) reports that more than 80 per cent of hostel residents wanted a house of flat for their future accommodation, and the results for homeless clients in the NGO sector in Germany are similar (Busch-Geertsema, 2002a, 2002b).

Housing-led approaches to homelessness – combined with the necessary measures in housing policies and social services (see below) – not only correspond to the preferences of homeless people but would also contribute substantially to reducing the need for temporary accommodation to a minimum, something hostel programmes have failed to do. Even in a much improved system, however, a need might still remain for a certain provision of temporary accommodation and some types of hostels.

In the following we discuss five different types of provision which might still be needed and some basic requirements to ensure a minimum of quality.

1. It remains an open question, to what extent the need for some kind of interim, transitional accommodation providing physical shelter can be minimised in an "ideal" system. People newly arriving in a country, region or a city will need some form of transitional accommodation until permanent housing can be organised. There will always be a need to provide shelter for cases of emergencies (e. g. fire or other natural disasters). People will have to find new housing after a relationship breakdown, after leaving the parental home or institutions such as prisons or hospitals. To a certain extent tourist hotels could be used in such cases and are, in practice, used in many places. The point here is to have a type of temporary accommodation which does not exclusively serve homeless people and which is decent enough to be used by "ordinary" guests as well. As experience from different countries shows, relying on hotel beds as temporary accommodation for homeless people is costly, both to the user and the taxpayer. [7] It is essential to organise temporary accommodation in a non-stigmatizing way (for example by using dispersed apartments within the usual housing stock) and make every effort to ensure quick access to permanent, regular

[7] A consultation paper by the UK Homeless Directorate (2003: 5) referred to bed and breakfast accommodation as "being the least acceptable form of temporary accommodation in which to house homeless people". In 2003 it was decided that no local authority should place any homeless family with children in such accommodation other than in emergency case, and even then for no longer than six weeks.

housing with security of tenure. Temporary accommodation has to be kept temporary (i. e. stays should be as short as possible).

Given the enormous differences of housing standards and general wealth across Europe it is difficult to define a "European" minimum standard for temporary accommodation. However, homeless hostels – including "low-threshold" provisions – remaining in an "ideal" system should have:

- A defined (and short) maximum time limit for authorities to organise access to permanent and self-contained accommodation.
- Minimum provision of necessary support for residents in need (regarding clothes, papers, health problems, financial problems, care needs, social isolation etc.).
- Staff qualified to provide such services.
- Minimum standards for cleanliness and hygiene.
- Privacy should be ensured, including single rooms for individuals with the possibility to lock the room. Families should be accommodated together if they want to, and the necessity of sharing sanitary and cooking facilities should be minimised. (This could easily apply to low threshold provision as well as to hostels with a stronger "integrationist" approach.)
- Standards should be the same as accepted for long-term living in special housing.
- Overnight shelters which are closed at daytime should generally be abolished.
- Residents should not be evicted without legal grounds, reasonable time of notice and offer of alternative accommodation.[8]
- Even where the flow through is high, user involvement should be organised in order to improve and control the quality of temporary accommodation and its management (e. g. legal complaint mechanisms, user surveys and user organisations, see Koch-Nielsen, 2003; for a national homeless user organisation in Denmark see Anker, 2003).
- Written contracts which not only define duties of the users but also services and minimum standards of the hostel. These need to foresee an external complaint procedure.
- To ensure quality standards a hostel inspectorate should be introduced with powers to make unannounced visits and to react to anonymous complaints.

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8 This is in fact what the European Social Charter, art. 31, § 2 states as minimum requirements (see Helenelund 2007).

(For further dimensions see also the benchmark standards proposed by Fitzpatrick & Wygnanski in this volume.)

2. There are people who prefer to live in a "protected environment". The problem of social isolation and of specific support needs, especially among older people who have a long-term experience of life on the streets and in institutions has been highlighted in a number of studies (for references see Meert, 2003, 31ff. ; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2000). While some might be happy to resettle into regular permanent housing with adequate support, for others a more "protected environment" might indeed be adequate. The same might be true for people with mental health problems. The key issue here is whether or not this is also what these people themselves claim that they want. A Danish program called "skaeve huse for skaeve existenser" claims to support people characterised by "unusual lifestyles" with unusual types of housing (see Meert, 2005 ; Benjaminsen & Tosi in this volume). The residents have a permanent rent contract, while similar programmes emerging in Sweden offer only special contracts without secure tenancy (Nordfeldt, 2007). Housing with a high degree of support and with communal facilities can and should be organised as permanent provision with full tenancy rights. Other options should always remain open to the residents of such "protected" or "unusual" facilities.

3. In some countries there are so called "wet hostels" which provide an accepting regime for people with severe alcohol problems. Aldridge (1998) presents such a hostel in Aberdeen and similar places exist in other countries. Residents regard the hostel as their home, they can bring drink and friends into the hostel, the ethos of the house is creating an atmosphere of security and keeping rules to a minimum. There are also attempts to involve residents in decisions about house rules and management. As there is no limit on the length of stay these provisions lack one essential element of definition of temporary accommodation. However, often protection of privacy is nevertheless restricted (no regular rent contract), to give staff the opportunity to intervene, for example if people run the risk of harming themselves by excessive drinking. The important difference between this kind of provision and the one mentioned under 2 is that full tenancy rights and lack of (relatively permanent) supervision might be dangerous for persons whose lives might be threatened by their life style, excessive drinking or drug use etc. or because of mental disorders. Legal measures are necessary in order to reduce the risk of misuse of powers in such cases. In countries like Sweden, where there is a legal possibility to put substance abusers as well as people with mental illness into forced institutional care in situations of acute danger, it can be doubted if the threat of eviction is necessary as a means of protection, and enforcing evictions is hardly adequate as a protective measure in such crises.

4. There will remain a need for victims of domestic violence (primarily women and their children) to find protection from their violent partners. Certain measures may reduce the need for shelters for abused women (for example by banning violent men from the family home) and there are alternatives to organising such shelter in communal hostels (e. g. using dispersed apartments). However, some kind of temporary provision for victims of domestic violence will have to be secured. An important requirement in these cases – as in any other type of temporary provision – is access from there to regular permanent housing for those who decide to separate from their partners.

5. In the youth welfare sector there is a fraction which criticizes early "dumping" of young people into self-contained dwellings without making them more active (through educational measures, training and supervision). Some countries have developed new forms of hostel provision (like the foyers in UK), which include professional training and are seen as a positive provision for disadvantaged young people. In Germany similar provision exists but here they are viewed as part of the youth welfare system. Like students' homes, accommodation for young people in training and education can be organised outside of the homeless sector.

Concluding Discussion

Although the institutional, policy, and housing market contexts differ across (and within) the European countries, the arguments presented in the preceding sections have emphasised a number of significant issues. In this final section of the paper, we will summarise our argument and relate findings and views speaking against the hostel institution to the functions that it is supposed to fulfil and link the result to the requirements of hostels that would possibly remain in an "ideal" system.

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 or at least accept it, and when it is detached from force and control.

The need to control homeless people or protect the environment against them should not be satisfied through shelters. Furthermore, there are both ethical and rational reasons to avoid the situation where hostels are used as a *punishment* or

deterrence, or as a "worse alternative" for those homeless people who are accommodated in other ways. If they are, the hostel cannot be expected to serve as an emergency solution at the same time, since the punishment function unavoidably stigmatises both the hostel and its residents.

Nevertheless, there may still be homeless people in need of *protection* (e. g. in women's refuges), and it sometimes makes sense to provide this collectively in a hostel. In this case, there should always be a possibility to choose individual living and private space should be ensured. In addition, there may always be a need for *physical shelter* in emergency situations, although the hostel is by far not the only solution to such crises. Caution is also needed against extending the meaning of emergency or crisis to cover deficient political ambitions to end homelessness. As Kim Hopper (2004, p. 502) puts it:

> "For the vast majority, shelters are temporary way stations in what – short of an exit premised on securing affordable housing – turn out to be persisting cycles of residential instability. So long as the image of a homeless crisis could be sustained, the answer of emergency shelter seems to suffice, even as evidence mounts of its manifest insufficiency."

Hence, we can conclude that hostels as a solution to literal homelessness is only motivated as a way to provide temporary, physical shelter in cases of emergency, including pressing needs for protection against violence. Long-term living in hostels for people with mental illness, substance abuse problems and/or "unusual lifestyles" is only motivated insofar as these people *themselves prefer communal living* to independent, secure housing with ambulatory support on request, and should always include security of tenure. Even in these cases, however, a number of minimum requirements should be fulfilled. These include access to privacy (single rooms) and social space (also in daytime), protection against immediate evictions and evictions without legal grounds, standards equalling those in special housing intended for long-term living, access to support when needed, and an institutional structure that secures users' influence as well as individuals' right to issue complaints. The quality of all hostels should be subject to public control and also those who claim they prefer hostels should be provided with opportunities to find mainstream housing instead.

Reducing homelessness and the supposed need for temporary accommodation has to go along with important measures in the fields of housing policies and social services. First of all enough regular housing has to be made available and to be affordable. In addition, access to regular and permanent housing must be secured for all people living in a country (with some special provision for those in need of intensive care and support or special facilities because of disabilities – but a lot of this can also be provided in regular housing). For some groups perceived as "risky

tenants" by landlords it will be necessary to secure financial support for rent-paying and to provide guarantees for covering potential rent arrears or property damages. Influence on the allocation of housing for disadvantaged households is essential.

Adequate social support for those people who have difficulties in sustaining a tenancy is necessary, but this can be offered on a flexible basis and tenancies should not be conditioned on receipt of such support. Preventive measures have to be implemented or improved in order to stop people from becoming homeless because of rent arrears/repossessions or institutional discharge or for other reasons. There is a need for legislation which protects tenants (and owner occupiers) from evictions. Last, but not least, a general consensus in society is required that in wealthy European countries, homelessness, no more than starvation, should not be accepted as legitimate punishment for any kind of behaviour.

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