

## **UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOMELESSNESS IN DENMARK – DEFINITIONS IN THE LEGISLATION AND IN RESEARCH PROJECTS.**

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Draft

With this paper I aim at outlining understandings of homelessness and present central research on the topic in Denmark. I shall begin by outlining an official – or juridical – understanding, and briefly touch on the development of this understanding during the last decade, within which significant juridical changes have taken place. I shall then turn to the understanding of homelessness that are found in Danish research on the phenomenon, and at the same time present some of the major studies carried out.

### **Homelessness in the legislation**

I shall begin by outlining – very briefly – the political, i.e. the legal, understanding of homelessness as this can be traced in the legislation on the topic since the enactment of The Social Assistance Act in 1976. It might be worth noticing that there does not exist any ‘homeless-legislation’ in Denmark. In general, there is a social legislation that provides universal measures for all citizens – sometimes based on social workers’ evaluations of needs. These universal measures are also available for people living at shelters. In addition to the universal measures – e.g. the right to welfare payment, right to old-age pension, right to early retirement pension all independently of ones degree of contact with the labour market – there are a few targeted measures concerning homeless people. In the social legislation these are 1) the regional counties’ obligation to providing temporary sheltering in accordance with section 94,<sup>2</sup> 2) section 66 which obliges the municipality to provide temporary sheltering for singles and families in acute need, and 3) the possibility

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<sup>2</sup> Before an enactment of a new social legislation in 1998 this was stated in section 105. Thus when reading older reports on homelessness from Denmark one often finds shelters, halfway houses, and the like referred to as 105-institutions. As most of the research that I am referring to below its actually written prior to the legislative change they use the term 105-institutions. When this is the case I will use this term as well. I shall return to the legislative change on a more general level below.

for the municipality, eventually in cooperation with the regional county, to provide special housing arrangements for people with special needs – a possibility provided through section 91. I shall touch on these three sections below.

I will begin by outlining **the Danish citizen's right to sheltering, but not to housing**. In section 66 in the social legislation it is stated, "the municipality allocates shelter ... when an individual or a family is without residence" (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998. Section 66 in *Lov om Social Service [Legislation on Social Service]. TBS translation*). In the legal commenting of the section, it is emphasised that the right is to temporary sheltering only. Thus, there does not exist a right to permanent housing in the Danish legislation. In practise, however, a lot of the municipalities (around 70 percent according to Ising et al., 2001) do also provide permanent housing, but an applicant may have to wait a while – e.g. around one year in Copenhagen – before one is assigned to a permanent dwelling. Furthermore an applicant is assessed by the municipality's social workers. In general, the applicant has to fit a category of clients not able to solve his or her own housing problem and not judged as incapable of living in ordinary housing, but there are variations between the different municipalities concerning this categorization (Anker et. al, 2002; Christensen & Stax, 2002).

Turning to the specific measures aimed at homeless people I will begin by emphasising section 105 in the Social Assistance Act – the former social legislation. In the beginning – which in our case is in 1974 when the parliament decided that the Social Assistance Act should take effect in 1976 – the homeless people were referred to 'by name' in section 105, which read:

"§ 105. The regional council has to make sure that there exists possibility for enrolment at shelters and other institutions for persons who are homeless or cannot get used to the ordinary social life."(Ministry of Social Affairs, 1994. *TBS translation*)

Back then the term homeless was used in the legislation, and, by reading annual reports from shelters and the like it seems that the term referred to people without a place to reside.<sup>3</sup> But in section 105 there is also an acknowledgement of the existence of people in need for sheltering who might formally have a place to reside, but who are unable to live an ordinary social life. Over the years, discussions came and went and so did

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<sup>3</sup> The sources on which I base this interpretation are all from the 90's reflecting back on the development of homelessness. Such reflections should probably not be taken at face value, as there might be a tendency to reduce the complexity of the past in the present presentation (cf Järvinen, 1993).

understandings of who should rightfully be included in section 105.<sup>4</sup> It was pointed out that a new and previously unseen group – like women, people with a skin colour darker than the pale-pink common in Denmark, drug users, youngsters – found their way to places provided in accordance with section 105 in the Social Assistance Act. This led to the understanding that there was a discrepancy between the text of the legislation and the reality, and that the juridical text should be changed to fit reality. The consequence was a rephrasing of the – for this paper - important section 105:

"§ 105. The regional council has to make sure that the necessary number of places are available at institutions intended for temporary residence for individuals who do not possess his or her own dwelling, or who cannot stay in his or her own dwelling, and who because of special social difficulties need to be offered a place to stay" (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1994A. *TBS translation*)

The change has consequences for the limitation of the group, which is the focus of this paper. Through the legislative change the concept *homeless* is removed and replaced with the somewhat broader, and less clear, terms of people with social difficulties, people without a dwelling, and people with a dwelling but unable to live in it.

This more generally formulated terminology is almost equivalent to what we find in the legislation today. In the recent change of the whole social legislation (in 1998), there are only marginal changes in regard to the delimitation of the group in focus of this report. Instead of being people with *special social difficulties*, the group is now limited to people with *special social problems*, and instead of being the topic of section 105, it is now the topic considered in section 94 in *Lov om Social Service* [legislation on Social Service]. As a consequence of the legislative there are no references to homeless people in the social legislation in Denmark, and this has been the case since 1995. It is, however, worth noticing that none of the terminological changes touched on here are presented as juridical developments aimed at changing practice. As a matter of fact, the opposite is stated to be the case both in the legislative change of 1995 – “The changed formulation concerning individuals included [in section 105] is alone a consequence of a request for a linguistic modernization. Thus no expansion of the population included is attempted.” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1994. *TBS translation*) – and with the recent change: “The regulation [of §94] is with regard to the content equal to the Social Assistance Act’s §105 about offers of shelters, and activation support and caring for individuals with special social disabilities.” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998. *TBS translation*) Still, the general tendency has been a development away from the use of the terms *homeless* and *homelessness* in the

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<sup>4</sup> This discussion can primarily be found in the annual reports from various shelters as there is not much research on the issue of homelessness prior to the late 80’s.

legislation, and this has left the group of people more vaguely defined and less easily associated with a housing situation – or lack of a permanent residence.

I am going to highlight a final section of the social legislation – §91. This section states, “the municipality can provide temporary residence in housing arrangements for individuals who are in need of this due to physical or mental disabilities or special social problems.” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998, *TBS translation*) This section has led to a range of different housing arrangements, e.g. core and cluster housing, parts of shelters being converted into semi-independent housing with regular tenure contracts, shared dwellings, staircase communities and shed houses. These different housing units are not necessarily permanent, but on the other hand they are not necessarily temporary either. Instead, the time limitation can be bound to an evaluation of whether the tenant is benefiting from that housing arrangement and is fitting in with the housing arrangement. Evidently this raises some interesting questions as to how a person’s benefiting from and fitting in is evaluated and who is carrying out the evaluation, etc. But that is not the issue in this paper. Suffice it here to say that a whole new range of housing arrangements that are more permanent and more independent living-like than is the shelter, but less permanent and independent living-like than is the ordinary tenancy, has emerged over the last couple of years.

Summarizing the juridical notion of homelessness in Denmark there are no official definition on who are considered homeless, and it seems as if there has been a tendency towards a less clear understanding of this type of people. This development has been taking place simultaneously with a development in the housing arrangements provided by the regional counties and the municipalities in Denmark. There is currently an ongoing development away from larger institutions – or shelters – and towards many different types of housing. The legal status of the inhabitants and the definition of temporality seems to vary between these new arrangements, which makes it difficult to construct a taxonomy regarding tenure rights, temporality, ownership, etc. with regard to these newly established housing arrangements.

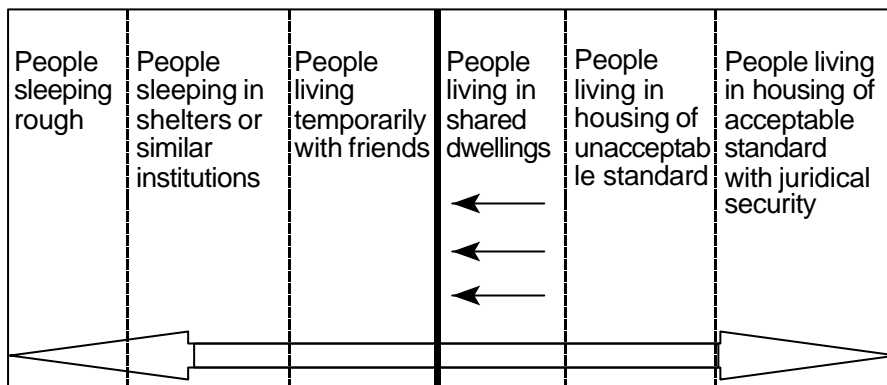
### A grounding of the understanding of homelessness in place

Having outlined the tendency towards a less clear understanding of homelessness in the juridical discourse in Denmark it is, however, noteworthy that the central parameter in the construction of homelessness in Denmark is still the dwelling – or lack hereof. It might be that there have been changes with regard to the terms used in the legislation and that a

widening of types of housing measures provided for homeless people can be identified, but the central dimension in the political understanding still seems to be the actual whereabouts of people – or more exactly of people's sleeping place. One might capture the Danish understanding by constructing a continuum ranging from a life on the streets to a life in a flat over which one has juridical secured rights, i.e. ownership or tenure. The continuum of today will look something like Figure 1.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For other understandings of home-to-homeless continuums see for example Lofstrand, 2001; Watson, 1984; Watson & Austerberry, 1986.

Figure 1: Homelessness understood according to place of residence<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of a continuum can be traced in the social policies directed towards the socially excluded. The actual categories included in this continuum change over time as do the demarcations of which groups are considered socially excluded and/or homeless. For example, looking back about ten years, the category of homeless people living in supported shared dwellings did not exist. But as mentioned above, during the 90's shared dwelling – and in the late 90's other housing arrangements as well – became popular measures to be provided for homeless people. Such housing arrangements were seen as measures that could provide its tenants with capabilities necessary for moving into an independently owned dwelling over time. Today – and despite the juridical mentioning of the temporal character of these housing arrangements presented above – it is not evident whether the tenants of such housing are included among the homeless – neither in official statistics, in statistics from voluntary organisations, nor in all the tenants self-conceptions (cf. Grünberger & Nyberg, 2002).

One further observation to present here is that almost all official counting or estimations of homeless people in Denmark – from governmental agencies as well as from voluntary organisations, and from users' own organisations, and as I will show below almost all research of homeless people – focus on people living at the institutions provided in accordance with section 94 in the social legislation. Only very few estimates are provided on people living on the streets, and even fewer on people doubling up – and the few estimations that do exist are not based on any research but are estimates by people who in their professional life are working with the homeless (Børner, 1997; Stax, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Taken from Stax, 2001 where it is a development of a figure in Børner, 1997.

## Research on homelessness

The second type of understandings of homelessness upon which I shall dwell in this paper is understandings present in research. As I have mentioned elsewhere (note xxx and Stax, 2001) it seems that research on homelessness became an issue during the late 80's and early 90's. This is not to say that nobody touched upon the issue prior to that period, but publications were sparse and those published consisted primarily of non-academic publishing, i.e. mostly annual reports and small papers from the institutions working with homeless people.

### The period of definitions

I shall begin an overview of understandings of homelessness by outlining the definition that I – without being supported by a citation index or other statistical instruments – find to be one of the definitions often referred to (cf. Järvinen, 1993; Jensen, 1995; Koch-Nielsen & Stax, 1999; Nordentoft, 1994; Stax, 1999). I am thinking of the definition presented by P. Brandt in his book *Younger Homeless in Copenhagen* from 1992. Brandt's book analysis the causes of homelessness and the use of shelter during one year. He studied 960 younger people who stayed at 105-institutions in Copenhagen for a minimum of five days between the summer of 1988 and 1989. His analysis was based upon registration of all 960 people's use of §105 institutions during the one-year period,<sup>7</sup> and on interviews with 129 of the 960 individuals included in the sample. The interviews primarily focused upon the individual background – especially the upbringing – on eventual substance abuse, and on mental illnesses diagnosed by Brandt himself. Brandt's main conclusion is that “[t]here is a special connection between early emotional failure, early mental problems, early abuse of drugs, early behavioural problems, and later homelessness.” (1992:172)

Brandt's study falls within what I think one could label the psychology-school – or pathology-school – on research on homeless. Here homelessness is closely related to mental illness, and the number of homeless people related to the de-institutionalisation of the psychiatric sector. Within this group of authors we first and foremost find Brandt, 1987; 1992; Jørgensen, 1988; Nordentoft, 1990; 1994. But the argument about the causal relationship between de-institutionalisation of the psychiatric sector and the resurgence of homeless during the 80's has been supported more broadly (cf. Bømler, 1994; 2000; Børner & Koch-Nielsen, 1996; Koch-Nielsen & Stax, 1999).

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<sup>7</sup> A registration of institutions used, number of enrolments, days at the shelter, and – as the key linking the registered information of each individual – the social security number.

In his study from 1992, Brandt defines homelessness when he writes: “A person is homeless when he/she does not have a residence that can be regarded as stable, permanent and meeting his/her demands for a reasonable standard of housing at the same time as he/she is incapable of using the different institutions and relations as an ordinary part of social life – e.g. family network and private and public institutions of every kind – when the reason for this incapability is some open or hidden conditions inherent within the persons themselves or in the societal structure” (1992:158).

In Brandt’s definition we find an understanding of homelessness as related, first, to the place and stability of residency – an understanding of homelessness as houselessness. However, it seems evident that the definition does not leave one much more certain as to how one distinguishes a homeless from a non-homeless. When does one have a stable and permanent place to live? And what are reasonable demands in terms of dwelling standards? I have found no specifying answers to such questions in any Danish literature on homelessness despite the role of a housing dimension in definitions of homelessness. The closest I get on further reflections on the issue is a working paper by Børner (1997) from which I have borrowed the above presented figure in a modified version. One important conclusion to draw regarding the Danish research on homelessness is that there are – at least often – references to a housing dimension in the definitions used, but they are left rather vague and are not immediately useful for cross national comparative research. Nor are they easily useable for estimating the quantity of people living under different insecure conditions.

In Brandt’s definition we find a second aspect: the lacking capability of being included in or using various institutions. Here, the terminology also seems rather unclear and it is difficult to use the understanding for guidance for empirical research. But what we can gather from the definition is an orientation towards the social relations of the homeless as explanatory for homelessness, and an orientation towards lacking capabilities on behalf of the excluded as what is imbued with explanatory power. This second dimension does seem somewhat awkward in connection with the first part of the definition of homelessness. Why Brandt connects the two dimensions – the housing dimension and the social capability dimension – is never argued, nor does he present any reflections on the benefits in regard to formulating research questions on the issue.

Still – and remembering Blumer’s distinction between ‘definitive’ and ‘sensitizing’ concepts (1969) – there is no doubt that Brandt’s reflections on the meaning of homelessness has been guiding for quite a few of the later research projects on the issue. This does not mean that later project simply has adopted his ‘definition’ but quite a few has reflected upon the meaning of the term along the two lines that Brandt presents.

At the same time as Brandt wrote his book on younger homeless people in Copenhagen T. Fridberg published his book *De socialt udstødte* [*The Socially Excluded*]. Fridberg defines the term socially excluded (which in a Danish – and for example in contrast to an English – context is used almost synonymously with homeless). He writes that one can define socially threatened and excluded groups as “those who more than briefly either are incapable of supporting themselves in ways that are acceptable to society as a whole or acceptable to him- or herself, or who are incapable of caring for themselves in ways that are acceptable to society as a whole or acceptable to him- or herself.” (Fridberg, 1992:32) This definition does not explicit include the housing dimension like it is the case with Brandt’s definition. Fridberg mentions no substantive dimensions in his definitions at all. Instead homelessness – or social exclusion – is seen as a question of societal and individual acceptance of living conditions. It is unclear, how this definition is actually operationalised at the time Fridberg carries out his study – or how Fridberg intends to specify the boundaries of the acceptable. But then again, the study carried out by Fridberg is not an empirical analysis but an attempt at collecting research based knowledge on the issue of social exclusion already existing – i.e. what is known about the various groups thought to be socially excluded (street children, non-hospitalized mentally ill, substance abusers, etc.), what is known about the causes for their exclusion, and what is known about the effects of the social measures enacted – and thereby pinpointing areas for future research. The definition by Fridberg was part of a project financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and it is his definition that one can find references to in for instance governmental guidance on the administration of the social legislation.

The final study from this period in the beginning of the 90’ies that I will point out is a study by M. Järvinen. In her book – *De nye hjemløse* [*The New Homeless*] – Järvinen first present understandings of homelessness in Denmark as these have changed over time. She shows how different periods have been characterized by different understanding, i.e. structural, pathological, functional, etc. The second aim of her analysis is to preset the experiences of homeless women using shelters. Järvinen avoids defining the term homelessness as she is interested in analyzing how the different understandings are part of the process of constructing, position and taming a group of people as well as a their social problems (Järvinen, 1992; 1993). But, as I have argued elsewhere (Stax, 1999), she draws forth three dimensions of relevance for understanding the understandings of homelessness: First, to be homeless is a classification that positions, i.e. separates and associates with other categories of social deviation, e.g. mentally sick patients, substance abusers, criminals. Second, homelessness expresses a conceptual exclusion where being homeless is seen as an antithesis to the normal, i.e. to have a permanent home. Third, as

a consequence of the antithetical status of homelessness it is seen as something that should be morally condemned. Thus, homelessness becomes a social problem and something to be controlled. (Stax, 1999, based on Järvinen, 1992:11-12). In her reflections on the concept of homelessness, Järvinen raises different issue than the attempt to classify some people within specific categories. She discusses how this process of categorization and wording is based on a certain understanding of the phenomenon, and she shows how this basic understanding is grounded in and reproducing *a priori* existing discourses, or doxaic knowledge that constructs similarities and differences and points out some issues as social problems and as well as some solutions to these problems, whereas at the same time blinding the research in regard to alternative issues and solutions. However, it seems that these reflections are left behind as she engages in her study of the empirical material – 40 interviews with homeless women – where she simply reduces the identity of the women to people using institutions provided in accordance with §105 in the Social Assistance Act.

Summing up the issue of definitions it seems that a definition within the research on homelessness in Denmark that is very specific and useful for quantitative studies of the phenomenon has not been developed. None of the definitions presented here – and no other Danish definition that I am aware of – are exact enough in terms of classifying different people experiencing a spell of homelessness or living insecure unambiguously. But then again, none of the studies have made an attempt at quantifying the number of people living in various insecure situations. As a matter of fact, only very few studies have tried to quantify the various populations of homelessness in any scientific way. In most cases, estimations based on – more or less – arbitrary guesses taking into account only the users of shelters being counted during a week once a year by Statistics Denmark<sup>8</sup> and personal experiences are provided.

In general, the Danish understanding of homelessness has been oriented towards a theoretical combination of the composition and social organisation of the housing market and a sociological understanding of deviance, and for this a Blumer'ian sensitizing concept has been precise enough. This use of sensitizing concepts might be enforced by the change in the group of people considered homeless over time, a change that I have only hinted at in this paper (e.g. with, and around, figure 1). In addition, once in a while a meta-project emerges pointing to the discursive formation of the notion of homelessness in Denmark.

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<sup>8</sup> Only counting the occupied beds at shelters in a given week, and drawing on the staf at the shelters own reporting, with all the uncertainties this includes. Today, the situation has changed as the shelters are now registering tenants by their social security number. This information is now used in a new register based research project that will follow up where the project carried out by Stax stopped (1999, see below).

### The time of empirical investigation

As the 90's progressed, the focusing on defining homelessness gradually declined. Over time the issue was more and more evidently accepted as a significant social problem, and less initial definitions and argumentations for focusing on the issue in the first chapters of publications seemed necessary (Stax, 2001). In this period, focus turned towards empirical analysis of different aspects considered as relevant. I shall not here attempt to present all the various studies existing, but I will highlight some of the research carried out on two issues that I find has been very much focused upon in Denmark – pathways out of homelessness and the lives of homeless people – and present a third aspect currently being focused on in a couple of research projects – social work and homelessness.

### *Pathways out of homelessness*

One focus of studies on homelessness in Denmark has often been pathways out of homelessness (under which I here include analyses and evaluations of measures aimed at housing and – more or less explicitly – thus reintegrating and/or providing security for homeless people).

### A longitudinal register based analysis of people using shelters

In 1999 Stax published a follow-up study on the people included in Brandt's study from 1992, i.e. people having used §105-institutions between the summer of 1988 and 89 in Copenhagen for a minimum of five days in a row. Stax's study, by drawing information from registers, retrospectively constructed the population's situation at the time of their use of a shelter and compared it to people's situation on the same variable seven years later. Additionally, Stax conducted qualitative interviews with 16 of the individuals in the population eight years after their registration at a shelter. Stax looked at the following indicators (chosen, firstly, because they were taken to provide an indication of degree of marginalisation and, secondly, because these were the variables available in the registers): family status, labour market status, origins of income, place of residence, conviction for criminal activities, enrolment into drug treatment programme, and causes of death. I shall not here engage in a presentation of the findings. Suffice it to draw attention

to a discussion (in English) of the methodological possibilities and limitations of register-based research and the possibilities of combining these with qualitative data (Stax, 2000, work in progress), and to a presentation of the part of the analysis dealing with the issue of substance abuse (Stax, 2003A).

This year, a new register-based analysis has been initiated in Denmark. And today, registration of client's use of shelters also exists, which can be included in the new research project. The variable included and the topics analysed in this new project will be somewhat similar to those carried out by Stax, but information on the use of shelters, half-way houses, etc. from 1997 up till, and including, 2002, will be added. Furthermore, the project will attempt to obtain information from the registers providing information on the childhood of individuals who are using shelters. This project will be supplemented with information generated through a survey. The aim of the survey is not to estimate the number of homeless people, but rather to evaluate the social measures what have been enacted towards the homeless people included in the register-based research project. The project is carried out at the Danish National Institute of Social Research.<sup>9</sup>

### Housing and homelessness

An aspect often touched upon concerns the issue of (re-)housing the homeless. A lot of research has been looking at the process of providing different types of housing for homeless people (e.g. Bømler 2000; Jensen 1995; Jensen et al. 1997; Stax, 1998; Stax & Kæmpe, 1999). According to Koch-Nielsen, the paths out of homelessness have often been analysed through evaluations of specific social experiments with different kinds of support, supposedly enabling a further degree of independent living (2003). Koch-Nielsen also summarizes analyses by stating that "[t]he results do not really tell much more, than the efforts should be tailored to the different and varied needs, and that the results depend on this and on the structure and organisation of the effort" (2003:8). All these studies are based on interviews with people living in the housing projects evaluated.

In regard to the re-integration of homelessness on the housing market, a recent study has been carried out focusing on the allocation of housing to people in need, i.e. people without a permanent dwelling and with no possibilities of obtaining a place of their own. I have previously stated that there is no right to permanent housing in Denmark, but the municipality has a possibility – which is used by around 70 percent of them – of providing

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<sup>9</sup> For additional information, please contact the author of this paper, see note 1.

permanent housing by assigning people to the non-profit housing sector. In Denmark, the municipality has a legal right to assign tenants to every fourth vacant non-profit dwelling, and it has a possibility of making agreements with the non-profit housing associations about assigning to a larger segment (Anker, et al. 2002; Christensen & Stax, 2002). This possibility of providing people with permanent residency combined with the general measures aimed at enabling people to stay in their homes, i.e. the universal welfare measures of for example rent support, the general social welfare schemes, possibilities of reducing and removing rent arrears, etc. has provided the basis for arguing that perhaps it is not as much the structure of the housing market that is the reason why people live at shelters but rather other factors.

### *The life of homeless people*

A second type of studies carried out focuses on homeless people's lives. These studies often focus upon a certain sub-segment among the group considered homeless: e.g. women (Järvinen, 1993; Kristensen, 1994), street children (Ertmann, 1991; Juul, 1992; Juul & Ertmann, 1991), beggars (Sangstad, 2002), street people (Caswell & Schultz, 2001), emigrants (Järvinen, project under way). The actual focus on the studies varies to some degree. Some are focusing on the pathways into homelessness (cf. Järvinen, 1993; Kristensen, 1994; Juul, 1992) whereas others are focusing on the organisation and managing of the everyday life (cf. Sangstad, 2002; Caswell & Schultz, 2001). With the exception of the last study by Caswell & Schultz all projects attempt to excavate the lives of homeless people through qualitative interviews. There has been – and probably still is – a tendency towards focusing quite a lot on the excluded people's own story – or narrative – in the Danish discourse on researching homelessness, and this has led to the qualitative interview being seen as the first choice in regard to methods. But lately, some participant observations studies have been carried out. Participant observation is the method used in the study of people living on the streets carried out by Caswell & Schultz.

### *Analysing social work and homelessness*

The final study that I will is a study currently carried out by Stax. This study also draws on the method of participant information, but it is not an ethnographic study as is the research project carried out by Caswell & Schultz (2001). Through participant observation of meetings taking place at different public institutions providing service of relevance for people living at a shelter in Copenhagen, and using the work of E. Goffman and Conversation Analysis, Stax analyses the process of negotiating the client's social problems and the solutions to be enacted (Stax, 2003B).

## Summarizing the Danish research on homelessness

The definitions used in Danish understandings of homelessness have tried to include both a dimension on housing and a dimension capturing social aspects of exclusion. An official definition of homelessness does not exist, and those definitions that were developed in the early 1990s, where research on homelessness re-appeared, are somewhat vague when it comes to specifying what is to be understood as dependent and independent dimensions of homelessness. For example, it is unclear whether the social factors are viewed as causes for the lack of dwelling or whether an eventual housing shortage leads to insecurity leading to an accumulation of additional social problems. Looking at the literature one is, however, left with the impression that most of the research see housing problems as derived from social (including mental) problems: that the general measures aimed at enabling people to stay in their homes, i.e. the universal welfare measures of, for example, rent support and possibilities for reducing and removing rent arrears, etc. are sufficient in regard to providing the possibilities for staying in a flat. The understandings of homelessness are thus directed towards the homeless person's lacking capabilities or the ordinary society's lacking room for deviance as the explanatory factors. The view of the housing market as not being the reason for people experiencing a spell of homelessness seems to be enforced by an understanding that there, in general, exists possibilities for obtaining a dwelling through municipal assignment to the non-profit housing market: that if a client is judged to be in need and to be capable of living independently, the person will be provided with a permanent place to live within a certain time span (in Copenhagen Municipality where the waiting period of a full year seems to be the most a client might have to wait, in other municipalities, e.g., Aarhus (the second largest in Denmark), the waiting period might not be more than a few weeks.

Most of the research carried out has been based on qualitative interviews in an attempt at obtaining insight into the lives of homeless people. But there are other methods used. A few study using participant observation as their approach to generating data, and a few are drawing upon register- based information.

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