

An overview of the papers on defining and understanding 'Hidden Homelessness'

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This introduction raises several questions about the papers from the French, Hungarian, Italian and UK teams the chief of which are:

What is the purpose of the definition?

Which type of homeless person is captured through the definition?

This later question, discussed in the Hungarian and UK papers, also leads to a discussion of differences between broad definitions of homelessness (as in the definition of the UN, earlier definitions produced by FEANTSA, and in the definition used in the UK homelessness legislation) and raises issues in relation to homelessness and visibility. The Italian paper gives another reason for arguing for a broader definition of homelessness – the conceptualisation of homelessness in relation to the debate on new poverties and marginalisation processes.

This introduction principally concentrates on the contribution of the Hungarian paper and appendix because of previous long discussions on the French definition of homelessness derived from their papers given at both the Paris and Madrid Workshops. It also briefly discusses the Italian and UK papers.

1. The paper from the French team – Maryse Marpsat

In previous papers the French team have described the classification system across four housing dimensions (housing type, occupancy status, quality, stability/instability) that was devised for use in housing surveys and for the purposes of being able to create samples of homeless populations. For their surveys of the homeless they used a 'literal' homeless definition, equating to the homeless living on the streets or hostels as in the United States. However, this identification of the homeless is based largely two out of their four housing dimensions.

Their paper proposes:

- To keep the idea of classifying all housing situations.
- To classify all housing situations across several dimensions including housing type and occupancy status.
- To have a norm of housing dimensions for each country: a norm on overcrowding for example.
- To keep solely to housing definitions i.e. to exclude domestic violence or racial violence which creates unsafe housing,

which they see as a risk that leads to being homeless, not as homelessness.

Their paper raises the question of whether all homeless situations that are not 'literal homelessness' (i.e. living on the streets, living in hostels), described in their paper as 'the area around homelessness', should be identified as 'hidden homeless'? Could housing problems be identified as homelessness if they breach an identified housing norm that was particular to each country? This all raises the question of whether all housing problems equal a risk of homelessness? What of particular situations or characteristics increasing the probability of becoming homeless e.g. living in Paris.

The analysis in the French paper of the 2001-2 Housing Surveys in France gives the following figures for the 'area around homelessness':

457000 adult children living with parents

472000 living with other relatives

64,000 living as a lodger or sub-tenant

Should 'transitional housing' be included in this list of housing situations that are potentially homeless? – it would be in the UK.

What is the relationship between people living in these situations and that that make the 1,042,700 requests for social housing? Who are these applicants and what is known about them? In the UK a large proportion would apply as homeless and there would be information about their characteristics.

Separately the paper quotes Cecile Brousse's figure from the Housing Surveys that 1.6% of people who had experienced homelessness i.e. 800,000.

2. The Hungarian Papers from Eszter Somogyi and Ivan Tosics with an appendix from Peter Gyóri.

2.1 The paper from the Hungarian team begins by discussing the main reasons for the rise of homelessness in European countries. These reasons need to be reviewed for each country although, in general, the same factors apply across all European countries:

- **Demographic changes:** an increasing number of households due to the growing number of divorces, the ageing of the society and the fact that people create families at a later age. To this we could add that increasing number of one person households in the UK (both older person households, and young single people living alone).
- **Growing unemployment** rate to structural changes in the economy: the number of periods without employment increases due to the growing number of the permanently

unemployed and the fact that the labour market is becoming more insecure (with less permanent, less secure employment), and in some societies a decrease in number of full-time jobs.

- **Reductions in social allowances** affecting unemployment and housing benefits in the first place.
- **Structural transformation** of the supply side of the housing market: a narrowing public and social housing sector, privatisation of public housing, a drastic limitation of public investment in housing.
- **Contraction of the cheap housing stock** as a result of modernisation and city development / rehabilitation programmes. The general increase in the quality of the housing stock does not affect the poorest of the society (Hertting et al).

To these five sets of factors it is possible to add a loss of affordable housing through increasing rents result of all or some of these.

2.2 The paper reports that hidden homelessness is an important phenomena in Hungary because of two groups of people:

- The 'invisible' homeless who chose to hide away and avoid shelters etc.
- Those living in substandard and overcrowded dwellings whose housing was never improved.

The Hungarian paper also reviewed the definition of homelessness available in the international literature following a computer based literature search in several European languages. The following classification was the result of that search:

1. The **acute homeless**, roofless, that go in hiding and live in forests, caves or other remote, often in makeshift huts or tents.
2. Those **homeless that do not have safe and permanent accommodation** but are not part of the homeless care system (e.g. people rotating between friends, squatters).
3. **Those that live in apartments, but their accommodation is, from some aspect, intolerable:** people in sub-standard housing units or in non-housing facilities, those in overcrowded homes, „concealed households” (who unvoluntarily share accommodation on a long-term basis), and those that live in physical or emotional abuse in their home. But also those whose

housing situation is uncertain, households in debts, or threatened by eviction.

4. **Those “not registered.”** Depending on registration criteria, this category may overlap with all others, referring to those in the same situation as registered homeless people, without being registered with homeless care providers; they do not receive services and are not included in housing allocation systems (if there is one, such as in UK) either.

The United Nations definition, reported in the Hungarian paper, is also interesting because it is as broad as the UK definition but it also includes the concept of ‘shelter poverty’ in its definition of the ‘potential homeless’ as being those who pay too much rent relative to their income.

- acute homeless: the same as the roofless
- homeless: people having temporary shelter in social care or homeless institutions
- imminent homeless: those threatened with losing their home, those to be evicted
- potential homeless: those that pay too much rent relative to their income
- hidden homeless: temporarily accommodated with friends or acquaintances
- those in unreasonable housing, e.g. those in damp or overcrowded units

2.3 FEANTSA definitions of homelessness are also reported in the Hungarian paper that first reviews Feantsa’s 1999 report (Hertting et al.) where definition issues also surfaced that suggested a classification system (based on Sahlin) to resolve the narrow-broad interpretation of homelessness dilemma. The Hertting et al discussion viewed homelessness as a continuum of home-to-homelessness, with rough sleepers at one end, and those with adequate and safe accommodation at the other. The different housing forms are described through two factors: the dwelling’s physical characteristics, and the degree of housing security on the other (the two housing dimensions that dominate the French definition of homelessness). This discussion produced a four-fold classification system (Table 1).

Table 1. Herring et al based on Isobel Sahlin

	Security		
Quality		High	Low
	High	I. adequate home	II. low security
	Low	III. badly housed people	IV. rough sleepers

Source: Herring et al.

Following this discussion, Edgar produced a scale of homelessness that contains 15 categories. Table 2. This scale is, in essence, a scale of visibility and if we look at the categories he produces it is apparent that those living in all these situations could be classified as homeless under the UK legislation. Those living with family or friends or with no legal tenancy would be classified as homeless if they had to leave that place within the next 28 days.

Table2. Edgar scale of homelessness (FEANTSA)

Conceptual Category		Operational Category
Roofless	1	Living in public space (no abode)
	2	Stay in a night shelter
Houseless	3	Stay in service center or refugee
	4	Live in temporary accommodation
	5	Living in institutions
	6	Living in designated supported accommodation
Insecure and inadequate housing	7	Squatting in buildings
	8	Living in low budget hostels
Insecure housing	9	Have legal notice to quit/evict
	10	Living temporarily with family or friends
	11	Living under threat of violence
	12	Living in dwelling without a normal legal tenancy
Inadequate housing	13	Living in temporary structure or shanty house
	14	Living in mobile home / caravan
	15	Living in dwelling which is declared unfit for habitation under legislation
	16	Living in a dwelling which is severely overcrowded

Source (Edgar et al – see Hungarian paper)

2.4 From the Hungarian Housing Surveys it is apparent that the problem in the Accession Countries is:

- a) Different in relation to size, quality, affordability
- b) But also different in relation to the different proportions of homeless people reported between those reported as 'literal homeless', those without a home, and those whose dwelling is inadequate:

Literal homeless – 25,000

Households without a home – 1.6 million (including families)

Household without an adequate dwelling - 3 million

This clearly demonstrates that using the concept of 'literal homelessness' (street homeless and hostel dwellers) is inadequate. The numbers of the 'literal homeless' in any country depends on the development of supported housing for the homeless. What does the first figure of 25,000 mean? If there was as extensive a network of foyers for young people in Hungary as there are in the UK, how many young people would be 'literally homeless'. If there were as extensive a network of women's shelters in Hungary, or Spain, how many women would be 'literally homeless'? In France women who live in women's shelters escaping domestic violence would be included, I think, in the homeless figures, although they have not been included in the definition of the homeless in Spain. In the UK they should be defined as homeless if they were not living in a hostel but with friends and relatives.

2.5 Policy implications drawn out of the Hungarian paper. First, viewing literal homelessness in a broader context it is not only personal causes that may lead to homelessness, but structural causes are also largely responsible for the emergence and reproduction of homelessness. Unsatisfactory functioning of the housing market and that of the housing systems, a lack of affordable housing, which housing subsidy systems are unable to handle effectively, are significant factors contributing to large groups becoming excluded from housing.

Second, It is necessary to make visible the situation of all groups of people without adequate housing, which in some countries can often include millions of people. For this reason a classification system can be effective only if each category and it's related problems are clearly defined and policy tasks to tackle these problems are also assigned. In this way the danger, often referred to, that the need of people in the most severe homeless situation, the literal homeless, would be neglected with the broadening of homeless policies, also can be avoided. The narrower homeless policies, with a complex approach, should aim the literally homeless

groups and those who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless. While the broader policies should target the vulnerable groups experiencing social and housing hardship.

2.6 Gyorgi's appendix to the Hungarian paper has a fourfold classification put forward in previous work

Box 1 Gyorgi's classification of homeless situations



Based on these definitions, the "hidden homeless" are either a group within the "roofless", or occur across all groups besides those who are literally homeless (people without flat, people without home). Gyorgi prefers the latter definition of the 'hidden homeless', giving evidence of the different groups in Hungary who are homeless in relation to Household Type: i.e. what has happened to the divorced and those who are living in partnerships. This is an important issue for housing across the accession countries.

2.6 The Hungarian paper also deals with the discussion in Hungary, as in the UK, in relation to 'potential' households among concealed households. The survey basically focussed on obtaining information in three areas:

- satisfaction with housing, plans to move house,
- quality of the housing stock, survey of related development,
- Assessment of tendencies of the housing market and of mobility.

2.7 The illustrate the problem of 'hidden homelessness' the Hungarian paper described different types of housing surveys undertaken in Budapest. As well as housing surveys there have also been surveys of the roofless, and in an area of Budapest, a survey of the 'housing mafia'. This latter is an ongoing research project in one of the most run down districts of Budapest (8th district) aiming to reveal the practices of the so-called "house mafia" and their

activities in connection with usurious lending. It describes the way they function, their interrelationships and range of penetration. Under the term "house mafia activities" the research includes real estate frauds concerning private- or municipality-owned properties or private rentals with the purpose of acquiring the dwelling. Some of these frauds are private crimes, whilst another part are organised. It is hard to provide proof of these crimes as a "legal" contract exists. Real estate fraud and usurious lending is partly interconnected: indebted households may become targets of real estate frauds (though not only due to their debts from usurious loans).

3. The paper from the Italian team - Antonio Tosi and Rossano Torro

3.1 This paper argues that the main reason for broadening the definition of homelessness is because of the need to connect discussions of homelessness with theoretical debates on the new poverties, and the processes of social vulnerability. The important concepts that must be considered are:

- Severe marginalisation and social exclusion.
- Pathways to homelessness, and the concept of the career in order to consider the process of homelessness

One issue is how to connect exclusion with precariousness, with the process of becoming homeless and the analysis of the factors that precede exclusion itself. Risk and similar concepts are important in this analysis. The concept of risk, in relation to preceding social factors, has a predictive element, although it also supports an individualistic orientation in relation to the explanation of homelessness. This raises the question of individual versus structural components in explanations of homelessness.

3.2 The paper presents the case of Italian women as a test cases and this provides us with an important idea. If we looked at the situation of women in each country and each point of the homeless cycle then we could see the differences that definitions of homelessness makes. Maryse Marpsat has written on this in relation to France and considered the fact that women are better protected under some social systems including the French.

3.3 The paper then raises the question of how to broaden the definition of homelessness beyond the definition of 'literal homelessness'. One has to ask when is the greater risk of homelessness occurring? In order to answer this question it is necessary to look at the previous history of social exclusion and

poverty. Under what conditions do these histories break out into the most extreme forms of homelessness?

Is it possible to build a consensus around a broader definition of homelessness? The Italian paper is doubtful arguing that consensus only exists at the extreme ends of the definition i.e. to Roofless and to Houseless. But how is 'Houseless' to be defined? But, as we found in the London meeting, for UK legislation some groups within the houseless definition of Meert et al (see below) would be defined as homeless, particularly those who had experienced domestic violence and were living with family and friends.

4. The paper from the UK team – Joan Smith

4.1. I will only briefly deal with this paper as I shall soon be speaking to it. First, the paper yet again puts forward the broad definition of homelessness used in the UK legislation. This broad definition also includes unsafe conditions such as domestic violence and racial violence. It also shows the types of situations which are accepted as homeless through reporting the figures for England for 2001/2. In 2001-2 households accepted by local authorities in England included:

1. Households with dependent children – 55.5%
2. Households with a pregnant women – 10%
3. Vulnerable due to mental ill health - 8.7%
4. Domestic violence – 6.1%
5. Vulnerable due to physical health problems - 5.3%
6. Young people i.e. single and not included above – 5%
7. Other – 4.8%
8. Old age – 3.7%
9. Emergency – 1% (e.g. flood, fire).

In 2003, after the introduction of the 2002 legislation, 8% of homeless acceptances were of young people who were either aged 16 and 17 years or were aged 20 years and under and had been in local authority care

4.2. It then reports a recent scale of homelessness produced by CRISIS in order to estimate the number of **single homeless** people. This is because a large proportion of single homeless people are not included in the priority need groups under the homelessness legislation. It is emphasised that this scale is to provide supplementary information on homelessness, not to replace the broad definition of homelessness that exists under UK legislation.

4.3 The UK paper then turns to the question of the policy implications of adopting a 'scale' of homeless situations compared with adopting a broad definition through comparing the new scale developed at FEANTSA by MEERT et al with the known characteristics of those accepted as homeless in England (as given above).

The further development of the FEANTSA scale by Meert et al has produced a very different 'scale' of homelessness than previous ones produced by FEANTSA. The Meert et al scale produces a distinction between homelessness and housing exclusion that would exclude from homelessness, 30% of those accepted as being homeless in the UK– those living with friends and relatives who want them to leave. (The Meert definition in relation to the UK legislation is discussed further in the UK paper.) The most important implication is that what Meert et al are developing are what can be described as a homeless scale based on visibility, rather than vulnerability.

Conclusion

It is important to ask the following questions of all homelessness definitions.

What is the purpose of the definition?

What is the consequence of the definition in relation to whom is accepted as being homeless in relation to household type (including responsibility for children), gender, age, ethnic affiliation?

What is the assumed relationship between visibility and vulnerability?

A broad definition of homelessness appears, in every country whether Hungary, UK, France or wherever, to offer a definition that encompasses homeless households, rather than homeless single people. A narrow definition largely encompasses homeless single people – those found living on the streets or in hostels not within someone else's household.

A broad definition of homelessness would therefore appear to allow us to discuss the relation between homelessness and social exclusion, between homelessness and social factors that lead to homelessness rather than individual pathologies.

Joan Smith. September 2005