

# Constructing Understandings of Homeless Populations (CUHP)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2004

(2<sup>nd</sup> annual reporting period)

The specific objectives of year 2004 were:

1. To set up the third meeting of the partners in Copenhagen (April 2004), the work of which was to map those methodologies dedicated to the collection of longitudinal data on homelessness, to continue the review of National and European policy issues concerning homelessness (and more particularly long-term homelessness) with the help of Danish NGOs and public agencies;
2. To set up the fourth meeting of the partners in London (October 2004), the work of which was to map methodologies dedicated to qualitative data (narrative interviews, life histories, diary method) and voice of the homeless; to consider methodological issues arising from the integration of qualitative and quantitative data; to continue the review of National and European issues concerning homelessness with the help of British NGOs and public agencies;
3. To continue the development of the website and include the papers from the Madrid and Copenhagen workshops in their revised versions agreed at the meetings of the partners following these workshops;
4. To continue the construction of the bibliographical database.

### What was accomplished in year 2004

#### *- From a methodological point of view*

The last meeting for the 2003 year (Madrid) had provided a guide to point-in-time surveys of homelessness<sup>1</sup>. The Copenhagen workshop provides a guide to longitudinal methods undertaken through panel surveys, official register and service file data surveys, and qualitative methods<sup>2</sup>.

Hence three long papers were presented at the Copenhagen workshop, each on one of the longitudinal methods listed above (a long-term qualitative study using in-depth interviews and observations following the same persons, panel surveys, use of official registers), according to the area of competence of each national team: following fewer people over time in order to generate qualitative in-depth data (Dutch team), surveying a larger population at time intervals (Spanish team), and gathering knowledge on a larger group of people through administrative registers (Danish team).

All the partners had prepared short papers about the existing longitudinal data in their countries or other related subjects, answering the following guidelines: “the short papers should mention 1) any prominent longitudinal study in the country concerned (or explain why none exists) and its conditions of replication, including the relationships with NGOs or level of organizing of NGOs or other characteristics of the context of the research that made such work possible, and/or 2) a presentation of a few questions, including policy outputs, or

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.cuhp.org/madrid\\_workshop.cfm](http://www.cuhp.org/madrid_workshop.cfm).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.cuhp.org/copenhagen.cfm>.

prominent studies in countries not belonging to CUHP, that the author finds interesting in regard to the focus of the meeting (longitudinal issues)”.

Among the key issues that were discussed during the presentation of the papers, were ethical and confidentiality issues in all three methods; methods of contact in establishing panel surveys; analysing the representativity of the follow-up group in panel surveys; how to select the group to be followed in qualitative follow-up studies; problems of accuracy and relevance of information which has been collected for another use than research, such as the use of administrative data, and the necessity of studying how this data is collected and updated; the importance of keeping the same researcher in follow-up qualitative interviews; the co-constructing of the stories of homeless people made by the homeless people and the researcher, the effect on homeless people of this research.

In the London workshop, the main methodological issues under consideration were the range of qualitative methods (observation, focused in-depth interviews, biographic/narrative interviews), the implementation of qualitative studies and the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. Four long papers were presented at the London workshop according to the different types of studies that the national teams had undertaken: observation of social work with homeless people (Danish team), in-depth interviews combined with observations on the street (Dutch team), biographic/narrative interviews (UK and Italian teams) and focused interviews (UK teams). Many methodological issues were discussed, such as the qualitative approach to generalizing (different from the quantitative one), the selection of cases, the importance of studies based on observation (as opposed to quantitative surveys but also to qualitative interviews), methods of analyzing qualitative interviews, ways to ensure the robustness of qualitative studies. Various tools were presented, such as vignettes, time-lines etc. It has been suggested that researchers should take into account the general social context (housing market, job market, benefits etc.) when exploring the biographies of homeless people through dating when homeless incidents occur (through the age of the person or what they can remember happening at the time) and recording the social context of that period on the individual time-line. The NGOs suggested exploring peer research, that is, research conducted by people who had themselves experienced homelessness and reported studies they had conducted using interviewers who had previously been homeless.

Another preoccupation emerged during our meetings, as we felt the necessity to better understand not only the tools and the methods but also their theoretical basis. This led us to add papers on the theoretical concepts that underpinned different research studies (risk theory, Bourdieu's capital theory, Goffmann's concept of career, theories of social exclusion, marginalisation and citizenship...). Some papers were presented in London, others will be presented in Milan, and this discussion will be continued in the final conference.

Another issue that emerged is the importance of the national contexts in which research is undertaken (funding, role of NGOs, use of register based data, use of a national identifier, etc.). This issue will be part of the agenda of the final conference, and will provide a context to our recommended tools and methodology as in particular contexts only some methods can be applied. .

### ***- From the point of view of policy issues***

- in relation to policy issues, the Dutch intervention in Copenhagen underlined the importance of identifying the recent homeless among the homeless population, as this is a crucial moment for intervention, and also described who succeeded in getting out of the streets and how it was achieved.

- the discussion with the Danish NGOs on the issue of chronic homelessness demonstrated the fact that chronic homelessness is not a given, but that it also has to do with the housing market in a given place. How to deal with persons who have several kinds of difficulties (such as drug and mental issues) and not to send them from one service to another was also a preoccupation of the NGOs and public authorities in Denmark. As in other countries, the diagnosis of someone's condition can assign him or her either to services for the homeless or to other services.

- several of the presentations in London had direct relevance to policy issues. For example, the Danish presentation was a study of the interactions between social workers and homeless people in a local welfare office and researched the way social work with homeless people is conducted, and could lead to recommendations on how to make them more effective. The Italian presentation demonstrated that if marginalisation was analysed as a cumulative process, it implied that more and more resources were needed to take people off the streets when they had been there a longer time. The Dutch presentation stressed the fact that qualitative studies had shown that after a long time on the streets, housing was not enough to provide a solution to some people's difficulties. The Dutch paper was based on a study designed around three questions: how did people end up on the street (triggers); did they live on the street the whole time or came off and went back on; and how did they manage to get off the streets. This paper dealt more particularly with the homeless perception of time and space and how they could hamper their regular contacts with agencies. It also gave some recommendations: to reduce the goals to small steps for the long-term homeless and to take into account the difficulties they felt when finding themselves in a dwelling again (claustrophobia). The first part of the UK paper reported on a study that identified particular risk factors in relation to youth homelessness that had been used to guide the provision of prevention services to young people at school.

- several issues were also pointed out during the London meeting: some of the said "causes" of homelessness are only "triggers" but the real causes go back a long way and should also be taken into account for prevention strategies; factors which correspond to a higher probabilities of homelessness should be pointed out to help policy decisions, but also factors which help preventing homelessness for people who otherwise are very close to it.

- the respective advantages of qualitative and quantitative data for program evaluation were also discussed.

- the NGOs stressed the necessity of research to evaluate not only programs, but also the consequences of the legislation, not only about homelessness, but also, for example, about immigration.

### ***- From the point of view of dissemination strategies***

Dissemination of results has been mostly accomplished through the website, contacts during the workshops with local research teams, NGOs and public agencies, and various presentations at conferences.

The coordinator has also submitted a presentation of the CUHP network to the Newsletter on "EU Research on Social Sciences and Humanities" (November 2004).

### **The website**

The papers from the first three workshops are on the site, as stated by the contract. The transcriptions of the first three workshops are on the private part of the website and can be accessed by the Commission and the partners using appropriate login and password. Beyond the papers related to the meetings, two other papers were added:

- A paper on the classification of housing situations, by François Clanché (France). This paper has some additional information on the definition of homelessness used in France, and more generally is a reflection on the principles which should found such definitions.
- A paper on the ethical aspects of researching homelessness, written by Jean-Marie Firdion, Maryse Marpsat and Michel Bozon (France).

After discussion between the partners (by e-mail or during the meetings), the Site Map on the first page of the website has been slightly modified in order to give a better access to the various papers, through the implementation of an “outputs” entry. At the Copenhagen meeting, the research teams have been requested to give links to NGOs, government agencies and research sites on the issue of homelessness. A first list of the links is prepared and it will be soon on the Website.

The website is indexed on Google and the «contact us» facility can ensure the communication between the coordinator and the persons interested by the works.

### ***- The bibliographical database***

A final version of the thesaurus, a first version of which was built and discussed in 2003, has been put on the website.

At the Copenhagen workshop the criteria for the choice of references were discussed. The objective is not to offer an exhaustive bibliographical database, as other bibliographies are already available on the Internet, but to provide an easy to use database in relation with the topic of the CUHP and especially the methodologies used in the research on homelessness as they are discussed in the workshops.

The database is being completed. As of now, it includes 400 entries. Most of the titles and abstracts have already been translated into English. After the final verifications the database will be put on the website.