

Dynamic perspective on homelessness: a few questions

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1. Longitudinal studies on the homeless - according to the models focused on in this workshop: studies at different points in time, panels etc - are not available in Italy. To some extent this type of study exists for poverty. There are some (not many) surveys by the National Statistics Office (ISTAT) which measure the same data on the same groups over time: even though they are not focused on poverty, they contain potential information for analysing vulnerability or social risk.

The 2000 report of the *Commissione di indagine sull'esclusione sociale* (Commission for investigating social exclusion) used data from the European Community Household Panel to examine the persistence of poverty over time. The percentage of individuals suffering poverty in only one of the periods examined was 13%. This figure is halved for those in a condition of poverty for two years out of four and falls to 4.1% if the poverty lasts for three years. The percentage that are "always poor", which is to say suffer hardship permanently, is 3.2%. 26% of individuals experienced poverty in at least one of the four years considered.

The index of the diffusion of "permanent poverty" in Italy for the period 1993-96 was 9.1%, the proportion in other words of the number of individuals whose income was below the poverty line over the four year period. This percentage obviously included the 3.2% of the always poor and signals the existence of a hardly negligible proportion of the population, almost 10%, which fluctuates around the poverty threshold without managing to rise above it permanently.

The main factors that increase the risk of persistent poverty seem to be lack of employment and household size. Unemployment and children under the age of 18 increased the probability of remaining "always poor" in the period examined by 3.8% and 2.93% respectively. Residing in southern Italy also increased the probability by almost 2% (1.95%) (Commissione 2002).

There are then various studies at local level which draw on data in files of welfare service provision and manage to reconstruct the poverty histories of families and individuals, the mobility, the duration of the period for poverty, leaving the welfare circuit, and events that favour dependency or determine greater autonomy (Siza 2003).

This second type of study belongs to a line of thought which focuses on reconstructing the paths to poverty, with particular attention to the effect of the progressive accumulation of negative events. "In many studies the dynamics of poverty is mainly interpreted as social drifting and escapes from this condition are considered infrequent": *ibidem*): a central theme, as we shall see, in the methodological debate on the analysis of the dynamics of poverty. The reconstruction of paths to poverty, however, is achieved in many studies with a biographical approach rather than with longitudinal analysis as intended here.

We are in the presence here of a qualitative line of research, considered very important by Italian research workers, which combines resort to interviews and life stories with a conceptual apparatus which places the emphasis on poverty and marginalisation as processes and on the importance of the paths and the chains and events that lead to poverty, etc. (Tosi 2003c).

2. This conceptual apparatus and this methodological preference are found in the studies on homelessness. With few exceptions, the research on the homeless in Italy (apart from the studies based on reprocessing of data on the use of specific services) is centred on individual case histories/life stories. Recourse to in-depth interviews/life stories, with this conceptual apparatus, is found in a number of recent studies on the homeless (Bonadonna 2001, Meo 2000, Bergamaschi 1999). The *Indagine sulle persone senza dimora* (research project on persons of no abode) performed by the Zancan Foundation for the *Commissione di indagine sull'esclusione sociale*

(commission for investigating social exclusion) (2000) also worked along the same lines. The authors start with a good summary of the conceptual apparatus common to this type of research.

“Studies and research on poverty have demonstrated that in most cases, the condition of socio-economic hardship is the outcome of a process during which a chain of event occurs”. “These events progressively require the use of greater and greater resources until the capacity of the individual or the family to satisfy their own needs is exhausted. Basically, in general, the condition of poverty cannot be put down to one specific circumstance but to a progressive worsening of life as a whole. In the case of persons of no abode, however, a ‘precipitating’ event can often be traced which marks the breaking point in their life histories. Usually it is the circumstance in which the home was lost. In most cases, however, there are events which weigh on situations - individual or family - that have already been weakened, in which resources or capacities are already scarce both because of intrinsic fragility - atypical families, scarce cultural resources, scarce financial resources - and because of a previous succession of destabilising events - illnesses, bereavements, psychological problems and unemployment. There are often ‘events-catastrophes’ at the origin of a no abode condition which unload onto a multiplicity of factors to produce vicious circles that it is very difficult to exit from. The spheres in which these events most frequently occur are those of work and family relationships” (Commissione 2002).

We can say that as far as the homeless are concerned the functions of “dynamic” studies are performed by this model which characterises Italian research on (extreme) poverty. Life stories/biographies are basically given the task of finding the time variable (trajectories etc) and (in part) of meeting the policy demands typically pursued by longitudinal studies.

3. This paper focuses on three themes:

- some methodological and theoretical problems raised by recent dynamic analysis proposals in the field of poverty. The concept of dynamic analysis – as proposed throughout the 1990s – is broader and more complex than that of longitudinal studies in the strict sense of the term, and – although they regard poverty more generally – the indications that emerged from them also pose interesting questions for the study of the homeless;
- some of the Italian research data on the duration/permanence of homelessness obtained from point in time studies;
- some considerations on studies which adopted follow-up models of research and were conducted in various countries on the housing reintegration of homeless persons (a similar research study was carried out as part of the Impact Project: I will report on that in the next workshop since the use that was made of it is in line with the subjects dealt with by the workshop).

The paper doesn't focus on methodological problems, but rather on conceptual/interpretative problems connected with time variables. Different ways of looking at the dimension of time that recur in studies on homelessness based on the notions of path and trajectory are considered as are movements in/out of homelessness in particular. The interest in these movements, as is known, turns on the main practical questions such as:

- the (possibility of) moving out of homelessness: whether this means being “sunk in vicious circles of poverty without hope for very long periods” (Leisering 2003, 32); if “once socially marginalised – always... ?” (Borner Stax 2004) (At least implicitly, this question refers to hard and/or long-term forms of homelessness);
- the probability/capacity to maintain the condition acquired, once a route to rehousing/resettlement has been completed.

Dynamic analysis of poverty

4. An interest appeared in the “dynamic analysis of poverty” in Europe in the 1990s (above all in the UK and in Germany). The objective was to use these time analyses to see paths in/out of poverty, and how long poor people remained poor and which processes determine movements in or out of this condition. “Poverty is not inevitably a stable condition; on the contrary, it is more frequently a brief experience in life which only involves families for limited periods of time”. “Most people who start on a path into poverty remain in this condition for only a few years, only very few persons will become chronically poor” (Siza 2003, 87). This redefinition went hand-in-hand with the accent on the relative “diffusion” of poverty, the idea that these risks also extend to the middle classes. As might be guessed, behind these empirical objectives lay a different vision of poverty and the processes that produce it, and a series of precise theoretical assumptions (to which I will return at the end).

According to Leisering (2003), there is a fundamental ambivalence of the dynamic approach to poverty, which regards an essential point of concerns over the time variable: the possibility of moving out of poverty (or of homelessness). “There are two seemingly contrary uses of the dynamic model: one that generates a more optimistic picture by highlighting the chances of the poor to move out of poverty, and another, pessimistic perspective that emphasises processes of cumulative deprivation and decline. The dynamic perspective is not as new as commonly held, but earlier versions tended to expound the pessimistic view”.

This body of research, therefore, not only goes against static representations of poverty (poverty as a condition in which individuals and groups find themselves relatively permanently), but also against the assumptions of previous research studies on poverty which included dynamic elements. Although the research on marginalisation focuses on an analysis of poverty careers, “normally these relate to processes of falling into poverty and of reinforcing the condition of poverty. These concepts therefore also relate to the relatively long-lasting conditions of poverty and fixed groups of poor people. There are certainly some ‘dynamic’ assumptions present, but only in the sense of the deterministic meaning of something inevitable”. Research studies that use the concept of social exclusion also have these characteristics according to Leisering (2003).

All this would express the idea of a “rule”, that still dominates, according to which poverty lasts a long time and takes root in the course of time. The theoretical reasons for this “belief” are: the assumption that poverty careers are reinforced cumulatively and that they can therefore only be pushed downwards; and that the poor are hardly ever conceived of as capable of acting autonomously, as active people who can be protagonists in the construction of their own life course (Leisering 2003, 37).

From the methodological point of view this dynamic analysis will lead to a variety of methods with simply one thing in common, that of not being limited “to making one single measurement or focusing on one single event” (Walker and Leisering 2003).

5. Although it contains some questionable points of view – one limitation, in my opinion, is that what it does not address or fails to include in its theoretical framework are precisely the long term and more dramatic forms of poverty – it does provide important indications for studying the time dimensions of homelessness.

One first type of indication concerns the question of where to locate the homeless in this time framework. An initial possibility is to see homelessness as precisely that area of poverty which best represents conditions of long term poverty affected by cumulative processes and in this sense different from the rest (the majority) of the poor. This possibility is suggested, in the new dynamic

approaches, when for example they suggest the methodological reasons that lie behind the belief in the “rule” that poverty is long-lasting and takes root in the course of time. “The groups examined in the studies are not representative of the poor as a whole. Marginalised groups such as the street homeless and persons of no fixed abode are only segments of the population in which long-term poverty is more common”. “The places where the biographical studies were performed, hostels for the street homeless and so on, automatically excluded those who had escaped from poverty before then” (Leisering 2003, 36-37).

This first line is useful because it places attention on relations between “normal” process of poverty and the processes of extreme poverty or homelessness: the specificity of the processes of extreme poverty, the possibility that they are of a different nature. The idea is present, in part, in frameworks which oppose the ideas of social exclusion and poverty, justifying this opposition by the timing dynamics. “Permanent poverty is the full expression of the outcome of a process of social exclusion, interpreted as a break between an individual and society, a break in the social tie... Occasional poverty is on the other hand an expression of a more general way of living, of widespread precariousness, of the main ways by which individuals are integrated, not specific processes, but a critical concentration, for long or short periods, of processes that are basically common to all individuals. The two trajectories, that of insecurity and that of exclusion, do not tend to intersect... only a small proportion of those in the broader area of occasional poverty will actually suffer the destiny of exclusion” (Siza 2003, 73-74).

Nevertheless the same distinction can also be applied within the area of homelessness: figures suffering from long-lasting/chronic homelessness and cumulative processes are just one of the possibilities and this type of distinction is commonly used in studies on homelessness. “Homelessness is a situation that can last a variable length of time, with frequent movements in and out” (INSEE 2003). The distinction between “persistent”, “recurrent” and “temporary” is obviously a classification that can also be applied to the homeless. The insistence on persistent situations and also on the difficulty of escaping from homelessness, assumes an identification of homelessness with extreme/long-term forms and an underestimation of the heterogeneity of the problem.

This homogenisation of the problem “downwards” reflects the strength of the prevailing constructions, which are centred on the hard cases - the “no abode” in Italy. (The construction of the problem of the homeless in Italy is centred on the figure of the “no abode” (*senza dimora*): i.e. the socially marginalised homeless which are characterised by multiple handicaps and by traits of desocialisation. In general the entire debate on poverty leads to a primary focus on situations of particular gravity and advanced stages in the processes of marginalisation: see Tosi 2002). It is also due to the operation of the underlying factors behind the “belief” in the “rule” that poverty is normally long-lasting and takes root in the course of time. The opposing model in the field of homeless would consist of assuming that the homeless possess capacities and skills and play an active role in managing their lives – ideas that have been underlined in many recent contributions to the study of homeless (Damon 2002). “The skills deployed in these areas can appear surprising and show capacities to react to the most destabilising conditions and to the mechanisms of insecurity and even of exclusion” (Ballet 2003, 9).

One important critical point is therefore to understand the difference between conditions/processes of long-term homelessness by taking duration as an indicator and constituent element of different types of homelessness and life stories. In terms of research this requires systematically taking into consideration temporary forms of homelessness also and reconstructing the movements in and out of homeless. In fact current approaches do little to capture these movements (INSEE 2003).

Homelessness of differing duration: the Italian data

6. Some Italian studies have explicitly raised some of these questions. A nucleus, a "hard core" of chronic no abode with few prospects of moving out of poverty (autonomously) was isolated in the very first national survey of extreme poverty (conducted by the *Commissione d'indagine sulla povertà e l'emarginazione* in 1992: see Tosi 2003b). This hard core is set against the "secondary no abode", which are considered the main component of the new homelessness.

The report of the Commission attempted to identify a "new vagrancy"- the general identifying features of which are, as elsewhere in Europe, larger numbers of young people and of female population. Furthermore, new vagrancy is characterised by a gradual decrease in causal factors linked to "deliberate choice" or "inner motivation" and an increase in "external factors" tied to traumatic experiences both of family nature and regarding relationships with institutions as with ex-convicts, the mentally ill, drug addicts and alcoholics. On this basis a distinction was made in the report between "secondary no abode" which represent the new component, and "primary no abode" - the area "where social isolation and extreme poverty may be easily and consistently defined, both in terms of lifestyles and self-exclusion": apparently "unreachable" - "refractory to intervention from institutions and to strategies of rehabilitation or of social re-integration". Primary no abode were estimated between 25 and 45% of respondents.

The most recent national survey, conducted in 2000, systematically surveyed the duration of the condition of being of no abode. It found that duration is associated with different profiles of homelessness and that duration is in fact a fundamental variable in the make-up of different profiles.

The study, promoted in 2000 by the *Commissione di indagine sull'esclusione sociale* (see Tosi 2003b) was based on a "strict definition" of the phenomenon and a *s-night* approach ("only those who at the time did not have a permanent roof over their heads, even in the form of a hostel or protected accommodation were included among the no abode. Consequently the only persons included are those who spent the night of the survey (14 March 2000) on the streets or in parks or in the so-called low threshold accommodation, which is to say in dormitories that offer a bed to sleep in and a shower for short periods of time but which do not require and do not allow any participation in daily routine").

The duration of the no abode condition is correlated with all the basic socio-structural variables. The most important, as it discriminates clearly between different profiles of homelessness, is the correlation with the nationality. "The duration of the condition of no abode for Italians is quite variable. Almost one fifth had been of no abode for at least 10 years. These are persons in extremely rundown condition, with a high probability of having lost all possibility/capacity of independently returning to acceptable conditions of life. In the case of foreigners, the fact that the large majority have started to lead this life relatively recently leads one to suppose that many will return to, or reach, "normality". For a large proportion of foreigners of no abode - even if not for all - having to adapt to extremely precarious accommodation is, at times, a transitory condition along the migratory road. The precariousness in this sense may mean difficulty in integrating into the working and social fabric of society, but it is a problem which they might solve in the future. This does not make the conditions of life of these people who spend sometimes short, sometimes long periods in extremely difficult housing conditions and receive very little institutional assistance any less serious".

Duration of condition of no abode by nationality

	Italian		Foreigners		Total	
	Absolute numbers	(%)	Absolute numbers	(%)	Absolute numbers	(%)
Up to 1 year	118	16.1	209	31.4	327	23.3
From 1 to 3 years	245	33.3	306	46.0	551	39.4

From 4 to 6 years	156	21.2	79	11.9	235	16.8
From 7 to 9 years	85	11.6	30	4.5	115	8.2
10 years and over	131	17.8	41	6.2	172	12.3
Total	735	100,0	665	100,0	1,400	100,0

12 stateless persons were excluded

7. Various indications can be drawn from these analyses with regard to the time dimensions of homelessness, as far as the particular condition of long-term homelessness is concerned. The debate as a whole establishes a relationship between duration and seriousness of homelessness, the cumulative character of the process being one important reason of the relationship. This is a point which needs to be better analysed. Obviously there is a certain consensus on the fact that it is difficult to escape from these situations and they require breaks of a similar nature to those that occurred at the beginning of the fall into poverty and - usually - extraordinary (outside) resources (for some, “leaving a homeless life means a change of identity experienced as a fundamental break which makes it possible to move towards an unknown situation” (Ballet 2003, 8). This idea however introduces different definitions of the time dimension: that once paths into poverty have been undertaken they are irreversible (“a person is no longer able, by himself, to return to independence”; but also that “a person will tend, over a period which may be long or short, to move towards a survival equilibrium” – there is an interest therefore in the idea of “a survival career”; the relationship between “the time in which this drift downwards is located and the time required for rehabilitation” etc. (Invernizzi 2003).

Follow up studies on rehousing

8. The situation of people who had previously been homeless and undergone some form of resettlement efforts is a specific concern of a certain number of follow up studies. In 2002 Busch-Geertsema provided an overview of these studies for four countries (Germany, Ireland, Denmark, UK). This overview was based on three individual papers on such follow-up studies in Denmark (Koch-Nielsen 2000), in Ireland (Higgins 2000) and in Germany and the UK (Busch-Geertsema 2000a). This is a summary of the research project analysed as reported by Busch-Geertsema 2000b.

In Denmark, follow-up studies were conducted by Kjær Jensen in the early 1990s and by Tobias Børner Stax in the mid 1990s. Jensen’s research involved an examination of 40 individuals who were clients of nine homeless institutions located in three Danish regions; these clients, who had either been re-housed, were expected to move out or had a more uncertain future were questioned twice within a time span of approx. six months (see Jensen 1995). Using administrative data, later research by Børner Stax involved a longitudinal study of approx. 1,000 people aged 35 and under who had used some institution for the homeless (and shelters for battered women) in Copenhagen in 1988/1999. Børner Stax tried to find out where (and how) they were living in 1996/1997, using as his source population registers, the central crime register, the register on causes of death and the register on drug abuse. The author also carried out qualitative interviews with 16 people from that target group (see Børner Stax 1999).

Mary Higgins reports on a follow-up on behalf of Dublin’s Homeless Initiative: 65 users of five settlement services in the Dublin region were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. Twenty-seven of the interviewees had settled successfully, 31 had unsuccessfully attempted settlement but not (yet) moved into permanent housing and seven had never previously attempted to settle (see Nexus 2000).

Busch-Geertsema presents the *ExWoSt* research field “*Permanent Housing for the Homeless*”, a three years governmental evaluation programme on construction projects for homeless people. For two of the seven construction projects (in Hanover and Bielefeld) a longitudinal analysis of the course of tenancies with formerly homeless people was possible and the author discusses methodology and the main results of both projects (see also Busch-Geertsema 2002a; the complete evaluation reports are available in German only. For Bielefeld see Kämper et al. 1997, for Hanover see Busch-Geertsema and Ruhstrat 1997 and for the whole research field see BBR 1998). He also reports about two evaluations of the outcomes of the Rough Sleepers Initiative in the UK, which made use of follow-up studies. In London, former rough sleepers rehoused under this programme were interviewed. One hundred such interviews were

conducted for a structured survey of the second phase of the *Initiative* (see Randall and Brown 1996), and for another study focussing on factors promoting or hindering successful rehousing under the Rough Sleepers Initiative (Dane 1998) another 70 qualitative interviews were carried out (50 with tenants who had succeeded in sustaining their tenancies and 20 with ex-tenants whose tenancies had failed, because they had abandoned them or had been evicted).

9. The primary concern of such studies is to examine the performance of a particular project or programme aiming at rehousing and/or reintegrating homeless people into society. However, these studies can help to answer more general questions.

“Are homeless people ‘with problems’ able to cope in ordinary housing? Does the rehousing of extremely marginalized homeless people through targeted support projects really lead to a better quality of life and to an advanced reintegration into society? What are the main factors that contribute to, and hinder, successful settlement? What is the impact of the ‘housing factor’ for the reintegration of homeless people? What are the welfare provision and support requirements for successful rehousing and reintegration?., (Busch-Geertsema 2000b).

Most of the projects or programmes analysed are based “on the firm belief that reintegration of homeless persons into permanent housing is possible and that this is a necessary precondition for further integration into society”. “This is by no means self-evident as numerous discussions in nearly all European countries show in which homeless people are still stigmatised as ‘people with an unsettled way of life’ or ‘people who are incapable to live in ordinary housing’ etc.” (Busch Geertsema 2000a).

In most cases (see for instance the German “ExWoSt” scheme), the basic idea is that “the integration of homeless people should be facilitated by the provision of the homeless with normal and cheap housing at normal building standard, with usual tenancy agreements”; and that - “where re-housing of homeless people [is] supported actively by targeted projects and programmes - a great majority of those re-housed [are] able to sustain their tenancy”. The model is supposed to apply even to long term homeless, or to situations of extreme marginalization, and to “people for whom conventional methods and assistance aimed at integration had not been successful” (Busch-Geertsema, 2000a and 2000b). One of the objectives of “ExWoSt” scheme was to show “that extensive social integration is possible even after many years of homelessness, and despite a low capacity for self-help, or a lack of personal prospects” (ibidem).

The results of these follow-up studies showed that the great majority of homeless people who received the necessary support has been able to sustain their tenancies and only a minority of those rehoused has returned to homelessness. Even homeless people with a long career of homelessness and of life in institutions are in most cases (as shown by some German projects) able to cope permanently in normal housing if they receive necessary support. “That support is needed, not by all, but by many of the formerly homeless people after moving into their own dwelling, was evident”. Moreover the results showed that “for a number of people the reintegration into permanent housing did not mean that they can cope without any social support and that they have solved all problems which had contributed to (and sometimes also resulted from) their homelessness”. Many rehoused persons were shown to continue to be marginalized through poverty, exclusion from the labour market and social isolation. (Many also continue to have considerable health problems, dependency problems, etc.). However, continued unemployment and receipt of social assistance by no means automatically led back to homelessness (ibidem).

Various aspects of these follow up studies raise questions which are typical of the dynamic approach to homelessness, particularly as regards long-term homelessness. A basic question is the relationship between long-term homelessness and “hard”, extreme forms of homelessness, these studies draw attention to the risk of identifying long-term homelessness and extreme forms of homelessness.

10. The involvement of long-term/extremely deprived homeless persons in reintegration projects reaches various critical points in the debate on homelessness and the resettlement of homeless persons. The notion of (re)insertion has different meanings for persons who are severely marginalized or at advanced stages of social exclusion, characterised by multiple deprivation and this is especially true if they present symptoms of desocialisation. In order to deal with the inclusion problems of these persons, the idea of multi-dimensional and individually contracted reintegration plans has been developed. While for other homeless groups, intervention may be (relatively) sectoral, starting from or centring on a particular dimension of integration such as housing for example, for serious marginalization, intervention is likely to be more substantial and decidedly multi-dimensional in character. In these cases it is generally felt that rehousing must form part of a broader plan of support, that the best approach is to tackle all the various types of hardship that led a person into social exclusion (Tosi 2003a).

Two points are specifically relevant. The first is a consequence of the fact that the outcomes of the resettlement process are different as regards the quality and “degree” of the (re)integration achieved. A marked improvement in the quality of life and the achievement of a varying degree of independence at the end of reintegration is recorded for most persons. At the same time most still have problems and in many cases the independence achieved is limited. This picture confirms the usefulness of making the idea of autonomy and reintegration a relative term and of recognising the positive nature of relative autonomy and of “precarious” or “partial” reintegration. For many people coming from long experiences of living on the street, partial reintegration may be an appreciable objective.

“According to many services, relative autonomy/reintegration may be an appropriate outcome, or a realistic aim, for cases of severe marginalization. ‘Relative’ means personalisation of the project and attempts to recover abilities that are consistent with the condition of the individual. Allowance must be made - avoiding an ideal reintegration model - for the value of partial or ‘precarious’ reintegration where full independence is not achieved. The value and the risks of this approach are evident (stabilisation in assisted forms of accommodation may hinder further progress towards autonomy etc.). This viewpoint often forms the basis for proposing protected forms of accommodation. In principle, however, protection does not imply any specific form of housing. It may even be provided with ordinary housing, and much of the debate is precisely about the advantages/disadvantages of combining protection with special vs. ordinary housing” (Tosi 2003a).

This confirms the uncertainty and ambiguity of the notion of “success” and “failure”. There is also a methodological reason for this, the fact that many research projects only regard either persons which are presently (still or again) homeless, or only persons which have been rehoused successfully. Relatively scarce is the research activity applying to both situations.

“In some studies homeless people – who at the time of interview were still homeless - were interviewed by focussing on their paths into homelessness as well as their experiences with public institutions aiming at preventing homelessness and reintegrating homeless persons into normal housing. Because of the sample and the basic focus of these studies they could only produce results on cases where a rehousing process had failed if it had ever been started sincerely. The opposite is the case for research projects which focus on people who were rehoused successfully. They may well provide some data on the number of people who have failed in that process but the bulk of information (and the results of qualitative interviews) concerns people who have succeeded in sustaining their tenancies, which does not mean that there were no problems to be solved in order to reach this aim successfully” (Busch 2000a).

One specific policy point is the relationship between the duration of homelessness and the adoption of “integrated” approach to resettlement. The idea of more individualised and integrated forms of assistance is a landmark of the new social services culture on which reintegration programmes are based. “In order to tackle the complexity and multidimensional nature of the hardship these persons suffer, integrated action (health, psychological and personal relations, financial, training, housing) must be organized that offers these people the chance to set out on a reintegration path” (Commissione 2002). However, resorting to an integrated approach may have different relevance for different profiles and stories of homelessness, being evident that full application may best regard situations of (seriously) marginalisation and long-term homeless careers. Generally speaking

it seems appropriate to recall once again the legitimacy and value of sectoral intervention: integrated action (in its true meaning) cannot be adopted as a general principle of social action and policy.

“Individual reintegration plans – constant personal supervision combined with strong support for access to services and material resources - imply (in principle) a fully integrated approach and much personal support, which seems reasonable for (seriously) marginalised homeless persons. For many homeless persons, however, even though some integration of support may still be required, it need not be so closely organized, and in many cases is aimed more at combining different forms of material support (cheap housing, job, income) or specific forms of care. And for many homeless persons a sectoral approach is possible as are multidimensional approaches which are not closely integrated – many homeless people really need neither a whole range of help, nor a strong combination of it in a strict plan with personal supervision. For these people it might be more rational to assist them by providing help on specific points such as housing or work” (Tosi 2003a).

11. The relationship between individual homelessness story on one side and on the other side the opportunity of getting out of homelessness and of successful resettlement is a difficult point. The general idea leading the debate and social work practices is that a hard story or a long story of homelessness will imply lesser chances for reintegration. Certainly “there are increased risks and a need for more intensive social support for people with a long history of homelessness and for those who cannot cope with mental health and addiction problems” (Busch-Geertsema 2002). However, put in such general terms, the idea risks to be misleading. An interesting result from one of the German studies: that first prognoses of social workers concerning the development of their clients and their support needs after moving into permanent housing often turned out wrong.

“Some residents who had been expected by social workers to be at a high risk of losing their dwellings again after having lived in an institution for many years had in fact become quite stable: their need of support had decreased and in cases of crisis they contacted the social care service on their own accord. On the other hand, some residents who had been prognosticated very positively in the beginning (small need of care, no special risks) often got into situations of crisis which also caused rent arrears and these people still needed care at the end of the evaluation period. A false prognosis was also made about the only evicted tenant of *H13*, who had been rated as an applicant with very good chances of integration and little need of care in the beginning and who eventually had to be given notice after several efforts to maintain his tenancy had failed” (Busch-Geertsema 2000a).

In fact, the correlation is difficult, and it cannot be expressed in deterministic terms. As a matter of fact, what makes the difference is the pool of resources available for the person (for instance, chances of further reintegration are often greater for those with higher education and work experience: Busch-Geertsema 2002) and for the reintegration process as a whole. Greater difficulties implied by a long history of homelessness are the consequence of a loss of resources (capabilities) occurred along the downward path.

Lessons from the dynamic approach to poverty

12. The dynamic approach to poverty implies a number of theoretical and methodological concerns which are also useful for research on homelessness. Generally speaking, the horizon is the need to connect "structure" and "agency" in the analyses (“the renewed theoretical interest in dynamic analysis is discussed in the context of the more general debate about the roles of structure and agency in social relations”: this brings into play the tensions between different approaches in the sociology of inequality, class theory and life course theory) (Alcock 2003). On this possibility is based the great effectiveness that the dynamic approach would have for connecting research and policy (“dynamic analysis is important because it compels us to face the processes of social and individual change and to examine the factors that might have led to particular social consequences and which, if modified, could change those consequences in the future”) (ibidem 11).

The connection between the problem of duration and time on the one hand and of policy/system of welfare on the other is clear and has been amply discussed for the homeless too. The most obvious issue is the role that gaps in current services (e.g. the lack of non emergency provision) play in the formation of long-term homelessness (Higgins 2000). Moreover, permanence in the welfare circuit is affected by the generosity of the welfare system (more than by the traits of poor families or by the effectiveness of the services), as is clear from comparative analyses. For example less than 10% of persons continue to benefit from services after 12 months in Milan while in Bremen approximately 30% continue to receive assistance (Siza 2003).

Finally, we have the methodological indications offered by discussions on dynamic approaches to poverty. Longitudinal investigations in the strict sense of the term, although valuable, do not represent a panacea and hardly constitute alternatives to dynamic theory. Considering above all the costs and limits of these studies (of the panel type in particular), it is a good idea to verify their surplus value (van Doorn 2004) and to assess other forms/methods of dynamic analysis and other sources of diachronic data (retrospective studies in particular) (Walker and Leisering 2003) – as, there again, is done in many of papers presented at this workshop.

It is fundamental here to remember that two versions of the new dynamic approaches have been offered: as an empirical method of analysis only based on longitudinal (micro) data, or as a perspective that may be included in a theory. If one considers the theoretical meaning of dynamic approaches, the reduction to method is limiting and does not grasp the sense of progress that the introduction of these approaches represents.

In the case of poverty in general, the theory in question is that of life course. “Speaking of a life course means analysing the processes of individual impoverishment in the context of both institutional actions and individual biographical horizons. These two levels interact to produce the time structure of an entire life course. Consequently, the life course approach goes beyond the original dynamic approach used in United States research studies and in many of the longitudinal analyses based on family panel data. Panel studies have been generally confined to quantitative analyses of income trajectories without any systematic theoretical reference to institutions, policies and political discourses that correlate with the life course structure - e.g. how welfare state institutions shape individual lives” (Leisering 2003, 32-33).

In the case of homelessness, “life course” is not a sufficient theoretical frame. It is therefore a question of discussing which are the appropriate further references for locating the time analysis of homelessness in the theory. Concerns over how to model the processes of impoverishment remain fundamental from a methodological viewpoint, working on the concept of “poverty career”, which is an essential tool in the analysis of individual processes. For homelessness too it is important to go beyond traditional career models of a deterministic type (the “one-way” model in which movement is possible in one direction only) in favour of probability models and contingent models: impoverishment career models which allow a variety of paths into and out of poverty (ibidem).

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