

Homeless Families in the Netherlands: Intervention Policies and Practices

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Abstract

The demographics of the homeless population in many countries are currently shifting, and this cannot be explained by the different welfare systems to be found in these countries. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the homelessness policies of some countries are converging, and we observe a combination of decentralisation, housing first, and a tailor-made, individualised approach. However, what is interesting is the question as to what extent these policies are based on a punitive dimension or on a justice dimension. This aspect is little discussed in the Netherlands where policies to combat homelessness are intended to put an end to public nuisance and to get the homeless off the street. Research into evicted families demonstrates that combining elements of (mild) coercion with efforts to solve homelessness leads to problems in at least three domains: the motivation of homeless families to accept help and support, the quality of life in the individualised approach, and the matter of registration. These problems need investigating, also from an international perspective.

Keywords: Homeless Families, Homeless Policy, Decentralisation, Public Nuisance, Punishment and Justice

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Introduction

Homeless policy has always been ambivalent. On the one hand, the aim is to support the homeless with their re-entry into society, and on the other hand, the aim is to combat their amoral lifestyle and curb the nuisance they cause, even if this only involves them being visible. The forms this ambivalence may take differ historically, and also vary with the characteristics of the homeless population. This article examines how this ambivalence has developed in the Netherlands, whilst bearing the international situation in mind. We present the outcomes of a study conducted in four cities in the Netherlands into their approach to curb the number of homeless families. We discuss these outcomes while considering the punitive or the just nature of these approaches, since there is very little evidence that this is currently a point of public debate in the Netherlands. It is interesting to reflect on this because we feel that our studies, without intending to do so, give rise to a more critical reflection on the effects of the Dutch policy on homelessness and on homeless families.

We take the following steps in our argumentation: first, we briefly outline the Dutch policy on homelessness, already characterised by a combination of a punitive and a social justice perspective. This is followed by a short summary of the study itself which provides the basis for the analysis. The outcomes of this study are then discussed against the background of the theoretical framework of punishment or justice.

Theoretical background: between justice and punishment

The demographics of the homeless population in many Western industrialized countries are shifting. Likewise, social policies on homelessness are also undergoing change, particularly since the financial and economic crises of the past few years. Both these trends are the subject of scholarly debate: is homelessness mainly caused by individual characteristics, or by structural factors, or both? Moreover, what are the implications for social policy if the causes of homelessness are mainly individual or mainly structural? The debate also pertains to the question of the particular societal conditions that influence the prevalence and magnitude of homelessness.

Several studies (Toro, 2007; Shinn, 2007, Minnery & Greenhalgh, 2007) have found increasing numbers of ethnic minorities, homeless families, women, youth and illegal immigrants among the homeless population in Europe and the US. There has therefore been a considerable shift away from the mostly single, alcohol-addicted males towards other groups with a variety of age, sex and ethnic descent, including families, which are, in fact, a special case. The root causes of this change are complex, and on the one hand have been sought in areas such as the declining demand for low-skilled jobs, the rise in the numbers of working poor, and increasing poverty levels. National housing policies and debt regulations for people who can no longer afford to pay their rent can make a difference. On the other hand, individual causes are also acknowledged, such as a propensity to take drugs, alcohol abuse, mental health problems or life-event histories. All these potential causes may or may not be related to structural conditions throughout Western countries.

It is therefore rather difficult to link the changing homeless populations to a welfare regime, conceived of as a typology of countries with more or less similar welfare arrangements (Esping Andersen, 1990): there is too much divergence among countries within the same welfare regime to uphold such an assertion (Benjaminsen et al., 2009). The same applies to the relationship between welfare regimes and housing policies. For instance, housing systems and policies appear to be rather different within the liberal welfare regime (see Stephens & Fitzpatrick, 2007) and produce different groups of homeless people: in the US the lower welfare provisions may hit more poor households, whereas in the UK, with its more elaborate welfare system, more socio-

psychologically vulnerable people may become homeless (Fitzpatrick & Christian, 2006). Because of this complex relationship between structural and individual determinants of homelessness, and how they are represented in social policy studies, varying emphases on one of these factors have been brought to the fore in order to analyse and understand the phenomenon. 'Orthodoxies' (Fitzpatrick & Christian, 2006) are however emerging, with the outcome that both individual and structural factors are now included in explanations of homelessness, though with different emphases in relation to policy considerations in different countries. What can be learned from this diverse picture is that country differences in this field are still significant, not only for the reasons mentioned above, but also because of the divergent definitions of homelessness, and because of the different ways countries organise their care institutions and provide assistance.

While these country differences do still exist, it is interesting to see that homeless policies have, to some extent, converged over the past decade. There is of course diversity, but a set of practices is emerging that focuses on the notion that homelessness is dynamic and involves much more than just 'houselessness'; it includes dealing with both socio-structural and individual processes. 'Housing first' seems to be a dominant strategy in both liberal and social democratic countries, with prevention and an individualised, tailor-made approach as objectives, and a greater responsibility for municipalities in the development of policy and the organisation of care facilities (Benjaminsen et al., 2009).

Housing first is the option to offer normal housing to homeless people as an initial step in helping them, irrespective of the nature of their problems, and not as the end of a care programme (Atherton & McNaughton Nicholls, 2008). Normal housing can be seen as either independent tenancy or a place in a supervised housing project. However, depending on the context in which this policy is implemented, this shift in policy can be interpreted either as a way of empowering homeless people or as a way of combating the nuisance they cause.

Illustrative is the debate as to whether the new policy is punitive, i.e. tighter control, or whether there is also room for a more social justice approach (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005, DeVerteuil et al., 2009). The punitive approach is seen as debasing the homeless person as an 'unproductive citizen', or as an 'anti-social' person, in need of correction and enforced support and who is denied rights to welfare provision. The general objective of the social justice approach is to put an end to the state of marginality and exclusion in which the homeless live. Therefore, this approach tends to defend the use of coercion only in the best interests of those concerned. For instance, there is a big difference between combating homelessness primarily as a means to control nuisance and anti-social behaviour, and as a means to help homeless people reintegrate in society. This debate can also be situated in the more extensive framework of urban space and policy (gentrification) (see e.g. Doherty et al., 2006, Murphy, 2009), or in the role of coercion in care (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2008, Flint, 2009). Importantly, this debate actualises old themes on the role of the homeless either as the 'undeserving poor' who are morally to blame for their predicament, or as people who deserve care and support because they are marginalised as the consequence of an unhappy combination of social and personal events and characteristics (Rosenthal, 2000). Moreover, this debate also revives the ongoing discussion about individual or structural causes.

In this article we take this debate as our starting point to examine the extent to which these approaches may be combined, and to ascertain whether they are actually at variance with one another. Taking the Netherlands as a case, we analyse this question in order to unravel the intricacies of a mix of these approaches which will then enable us to advance an extension of the debate, from theoretical and practical points of view.

The above-mentioned developments have occurred in the past decade. In this context it is interesting to analyse homeless policies in the Netherlands, particularly in relation to homeless families, since they are part of the new demographics of the homeless population and are attracting more attention (see 3). This is appropriate since the Dutch policy has only been articulated at national and especially local levels (Christiaans et al., 2008) since about 2000. This transpired in a

context where a broader discussion on the importance of a more pro-active, outreach approach to marginalised groups, referred to as assertive outreach (*bemoeizorg*), has been an element in social work since the 1990s. Assertive outreach combines elements of 'soft coercion' or pressure with elements of care and support. It has become a forerunner of the homeless policy to both combat public nuisance and to provide support. We now examine the developments Dutch homeless policy has undergone.

Dutch policy on homelessness

Traditionally, the Dutch policy on homelessness is highly localised (in 1994 already 40 centre municipalities were responsible for providing shelter and care for homeless people), with the state funding the municipalities and the third sector. State funding has increased considerably from € 177 million in 2001 to over € 250 million in 2009. Of a total population of some 16.5 million, there are about 18,000 documented homeless people (last official estimate from 2009 (CBS, 2010), and roughly 77,000 people living in sheltered accommodation such as social lodgings, hostels, etc. (last estimate in 2002). About one third live in the four big cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. The field is characterised by a division between care for the homeless, women's care, and the provision of public mental health care such as psychiatry and addiction treatment. The Social Support Act (WMO) has provided the legal framework for these activities since 2007. The Social Support Act is a broad law that covers the local administration of support for social cohesion, educational assistance for youngsters and their parents, disabled persons, voluntary care, etc. The municipalities' remit within this framework is to develop a concerted approach towards homelessness (Christiaans et al., 2008).

Over the past fifteen years the policy on homelessness has been increasingly dominated by the theme of public nuisance as a phenomenon, and the four big cities in particular have plans in place to get the homeless off the street, to render public space inaccessible to them, and to support the homeless through numerous different provisions. This culminated in an agreement between the government and the four big cities in the Netherlands in 2006 to tackle homelessness with a new Action Plan for Relief (Rijk, 2006). The aim of the plan was to improve the situation of the homeless population, and to reduce the public nuisance caused by homelessness. This plan was built on two pillars: an individualised tailored approach (by a central gateway) for clients and an inter-agency cooperation between all parties and institutions concerned. Homeless people (estimated in the four cities at 10,500 people, and another 11,000 vulnerable people at risk of homelessness) were to have an income, suitable accommodation, a care programme, and feasible forms of work. Concrete targets were set to reduce the number of evictions by 30% in 2008, and to put an end to homelessness following release from prison or leaving a care institution. Another target was to curtail public nuisance by 75% in 2013, measured by the number of convictions and reports of harassment. In 2010 the government and the four cities confirmed this plan by signing a covenant for the second phase, to end in early 2014. The aim of this second phase is to reduce the number of people at risk of homelessness, and to eradicate the small groups of people still sleeping rough. This plan is monitored annually (Maas & Planije, 2009, 2010), and the results are impressive, even though it may seem they have been revalued to some extent. After three years, a comprehensive approach and individualised programmes have been developed in each city, with a central gateway for participating in these programmes. Accommodation has been built, particularly in the form of 24-hour facilities and hostels, and housing corporations have made contingents of houses available. Agreements or covenants have been made between various partners such as housing corporations, care insurance companies, debt-assistance organisations, mental health and addiction agencies. Client registration is being developed, and central intake documents are universally used. In terms of the quantitative targets, almost 9750 clients have

been enrolled in an individual programme, evictions have been reduced by 19-49%, and public nuisance has diminished although the measurement of this was rather loosely organised. The Federation of Shelters (the Dutch national organisation that promotes the interests of the homeless) is similarly satisfied, and has given a critical but overall positive evaluation (Federatie Opvang, 2009). This implies that the association of combating nuisance and helping the homeless has become a legitimate and accepted policy, which is not further discussed.

The approach has been used as an example for the remaining 39 centre municipalities, and in 2008 they more or less copied this plan in the Urban Compasses (van Deth & van Bergen, 2009). According to the Compass, each centre municipality is to set up a central gateway and individual programmes, based on inter-agency cooperation between the partners concerned. While this is still being developed, an initial evaluation already pointed out weaknesses in putting the Compass into effect, such as the municipalities' administrative control, both internally and with partners (see Roche (2004) for comparable problems in the UK), support for professionals when developing new working methods, and actually achieving client participation (van Deth & van Bergen, 2009).

However, within a rather short period of time (5 years) the homeless care landscape has changed considerably, and has also seen significant changes in the homeless population: sleeping rough is almost a thing of the past, and former homeless people are now housed in supervised accommodation projects, live independently with supervision, or in dedicated hostels for drug addicts or alcoholics. They are off the streets, though their problems continue. We discuss the consequences of this situation below.

In addition to this picture, we cannot fail to mention the fact that a new group of homeless people has sprung up in the past few years: Eastern Europeans (initially from Poland, later from Romania, Bulgaria and the former Russian republics) who are entitled under EU legislation to stay in the Netherlands, but who, as non-citizens, officially fall outside the framework of care. Consequently, the problem that arises is whether these people should be summarily expelled from the country, or whether they should be treated with humane tolerance, bearing in mind the concomitant difficulties of language, long-term prospects and suchlike. However acute, these problems are beyond the scope of this paper, and we concentrate here on the developments in policy and care provision for Dutch homeless people. The Netherlands seems to fit in rather well with the international policy convergence described above: a decentralised approach with a significant role for municipalities, an emphasis on housing, the development of individualised programmes, and a higher level of prevention, are all hallmarks of the Dutch policy on homelessness. It remains to be seen whether the characteristics of a more punitive or a just approach can also be observed.

The studies on homeless families after eviction

Research questions

Within the framework of the newly-developed policies, as described in the previous section, more attention has now to be given to a new phenomenon, i.e. the supposed increase in the number of homeless families. In 2007 a care provider in the North of the country stated that the incidence of homeless families (i.e. parent(s) with children) applying for care provision following eviction was on the rise, and that the care facilities that were in place were insufficient in both number and quality. This report led to public outrage, the press had a field day, and questions were asked in Parliament. One of the factors that led to public concern was the fact that children are involved in the problem of family homelessness.

Because homeless people in the Netherlands are not registered centrally, there was no further information available on the matter of evictions and on the adequacy of care provision. The

Ministry of Health approached the Federation of Shelters to look into the matter. This Federation commissioned the authors of this article to conduct research into this matter. The first research question was to analyse the scope of the problem, that is how many families become homeless after eviction, and the second research question, meant to analyse in more detail the local policy on the matter, was what policy did the municipalities have for preventing and supporting homeless families? What kind of register did they have, and what figures did they have for evicted families? And how was the care for homeless families arranged in practice?

Method

The study comprises two parts. The first part (Kloppenburger et al, 2008) is an attempt to ascertain exactly how many families end up homeless after eviction. Figures on evictions were gathered from AEDES, the national federation of housing associations, the Federation of Shelters, the Association of Bailiffs, and a survey was held among the institutional members of the Federation of Shelters (about 90 organisations). The second part of the study (Kloppenburger et al, 2009) attempted to get more detailed information from four selected centre municipalities. We selected the municipalities on the following criteria: a high number of registered/estimated evicted families, a wide country spread, one of them being one of the country's big cities, and being in the initial stages of the problem. This led us to opt for Amsterdam, Leeuwarden, Oss and Utrecht. We concentrated on eviction by housing associations because figures from the private sector were not available. To find answers to our questions, we studied documents and websites from the four municipalities, and interviewed professionals from the municipality (including municipal healthcare), institutions for homeless care, housing corporations and health services. A total of twenty-eight people were interviewed as follows: Amsterdam 9, Utrecht 6, Leeuwarden 7, and Oss 6. Each interview was recorded and analysed in line with the research questions.

Results

The first study showed that national eviction numbers vary: in 2006 lower than in 2005, but in 2007 some 14% higher than in 2006. However, the information did not pertain to families, but to households whose composition may vary greatly. In fact, nothing about evicted families could be concluded on the basis of these figures. The survey provided very little information because most institutions did not have a register, and they could only give estimates (only 3 of the 24 responding institutions had a register of homeless families). Based on the estimates, a small rise in the number of evicted families could be discerned, but the relief facilities were generally satisfactory. Most care institutions appeared to cooperate with other agencies, such as housing corporations, in order to avert evictions. The general conclusion of this first study was that the existing quantitative material did not corroborate the alarming belief that the number of family evictions was on the rise.

The results of the second study show that none of the four municipalities has any form of central registration. Institutions for homeless care, healthcare services or housing associations do have registration systems, but they are not standardised so the data are not exchangeable. Moreover, there is very little information, if any, about families and family evictions. Only Utrecht had a central system recently been brought into use, but it has still to be filled with data. So it is difficult to get any answers to all the questions regarding family evictions. In Amsterdam and Utrecht the number of evictions would seem to have decreased, but what is not known is whether this also applies to families. Leeuwarden and Oss have seen the number of entries for homeless families grow, but this has more to do with complex problems of domestic violence or teenage parenthood than with evictions.

Each municipality has developed an explicit policy on homelessness, which includes covenants or other agreements with housing corporations to avert evictions. Housing corporations usually take action after two months of rent arrears in order to prevent huge debts accruing and to collect as much rent as possible. But they report this to a central point so that social workers can start outreach interventions to offer support and redress the situation.

Each city has these kinds of projects in place, and they have brought to light that rent arrears actually conceal numerous social and individual problems. However, the fact that these projects are in place does not mean that evictions are a thing of the past: housing corporations always evict in subletting cases (illegal housing), hemp growing, or serious public nuisance.

There is a general impression that the past few years have seen a shift from women's care to homeless care, which means that homeless care is put under serious pressure. It is not clear whether this shift is the result of capacity problems in women's care or whether the distinction between target groups is no longer adequate. There are waiting lists for homeless families in all municipalities, although emergency care is generally satisfactory. The waiting list pertains to routine intake in a facility. Families sometimes disappear from a waiting list and remain beyond the reach of care facilities, or families turn down an offer of support. It is also possible that there is a shortage of suitable housing for these families once their reintegration programme has been completed because housing corporations also have to provide housing for other groups of people.

In line with the Action Plan for Relief and the dissemination of this plan in Urban Compasses, each municipality has developed forms of inter-agency cooperation in which individual programmes, also for families, can be organised. The aim of these family programmes is to provide support with debt management, and to give coaching with social and psychological problems, thereby making it possible once again for those involved to keep their current accommodation or to be offered a new home. These programmes may last anything between six months and two years. This approach is coercive in the sense that families who do not accept this offer of help and support risk the execution of the eviction, with all the attendant consequences of further debt and maybe even of child protection measures.

Inter-agency cooperation can be more formalised as it is in Utrecht and Amsterdam, or more informal as it is in Leeuwarden and Oss. It is important to remark that cooperation works best when the partners involved know each other from the 'shop floor' and can work together to find practical solutions. Inter-agency cooperation differs between the four municipalities as a result of local specificities such as population size, social policy history, financing, and administrative frameworks. Inter-agency cooperation is sometimes supplemented by youth care services, or specific care for multi-problem families. Generally speaking there are problems with the administrative control of what is actually happening: it is not always clear who is in charge, and the objectives do not necessarily always coincide. This may lead to family interventions being counteractive.

Discussion

Our research does, of course, have its limitations: we did not speak with homeless families themselves, but concentrated on the policy and professional side of the problem. We did not succeed in gathering satisfactory data on the eviction of families because there is no general registration system, and our own survey was unable to compensate for this, even though the response rate was higher than in a previous study (about 37.5% compared to an earlier 33% in 2004). However, we were able to see how Dutch municipalities deal with the homeless population, which has grown in the past two decades, and whose demographics have changed e.g. there are currently more families involved. The local policies can be summarised as follows: outreach projects, which also involve an element of coercion, are in place to support at-risk families, but

there are still registration problems which make it difficult to know exactly how serious the problem of eviction of families actually is. Family programmes have been developed by way of inter-agency cooperation. This cooperation functions rather well, and informal contacts would seem to be particularly effective. However, administrative control of inter-agency cooperation constitutes a problem, and more coordination between initiatives is required. The capacity of care facilities for families is inadequate: there are waiting lists, and families sometimes simply disappear from sight. And there seems to be a shift away from women's care towards homeless care. The overall picture is of an outreach approach, with elements of pressure or coercion in the form of sanctions if an offer of help is not accepted.

Reflection on punishment or justice

One of the most fascinating elements in the Dutch debate on the homeless policy is the consensus on its points of departure: to combat homelessness by providing help and housing, and to combat public nuisance by either driving the homeless from the public space or by implementing stricter police regulation (Federatie Opvang, 2009). It could be said that the justice approach and the punitive approach coexist side by side, but there is hardly any debate at all in policy circles about the feasibility or advisability of this coexistence. There is sometimes mention of criminalisation effects because of the focus on public security, but then this is accepted as a corollary of the positive side: improved coordination and care cooperation and the efforts to improve the quality of life of the homeless (Zuidam & Pols, 2007). The Federation of Shelters' evaluation of the Action Plan for Relief makes some critical comments about the lack of a nuisance analysis and its link to homelessness, and about the threat of more repression should the objectives of the Plan not be met. Coercion and pressure are even seen to hamper professionals in their efforts to motivate clients to take part in individual programmes (Federatie Opvang, 2009, p. 54, p. 60). But in spite of these remarks there is generally a need for more critical reflection on what combining support and combat against nuisance actually entails.

This may have something to do with the fact that the forerunner to this policy can be found in debates in the welfare sector about the use of coercion and pressure to force or compel marginalised people into accepting help and support. In the Netherlands, this is referred to as 'assertive outreach' (Henselmans, 1993, Kuypers & van der Lans, 1994). It is beyond the scope of this article to present this debate in full, but this element of force has gradually become an integral part of the work of social and community professionals and of mental health and addiction care professionals. That is to say, while paternalism and interference were still seen in the 1980s as an attack on individual freedom, the idea of assertive outreach emerged in the 1990s as a way of not giving up on people in need, of trying to act on behalf of the marginalised. So the question was no longer about not interfering, but about how to set about it. However, public opinion and policies regarding marginalised people became harder and more exclusionary in the 1990s. In this context, assertive outreach gradually became a method not only used by social workers but also legally applied to sanction the undesirable behaviour of marginalised people. And it seems that this mix has been seriously missing from the professional debate on homelessness. The professionals feel that there is no strict and overall application of coercion, but it has been accepted as a pragmatic means to deal with those people who avoid care. Coercion is seen as a last resort to intervene in life situations where the client is not actually acting in his own best interests. How the effects of coercion in a more judicial and public order context are to be understood, e.g. in an individual approach, has however not been expanded upon, and the extent to which means and ends are at variance with each other remains obscure (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005).

The first point that our case studies revealed is that this principle of coercion or pressure is viewed as a normal element in the outreach approach: in the preventive activities of the four cities, the offer of support is presented against the sanction of losing your home. This is not

stated explicitly as such, but by being included as having rent arrears in a registration system that provides outreach support, it is clear that support is only given following an agreement to deal with the reasons behind being in arrears e.g. debt, family problems, etc. There are also local differences in how sanctions are applied: in Oss, for instance, the municipality particularly looked at the income position of families in order to uncover fraudulent practices. In our study we discovered that families escape from this system not only by shying away from help, but also by leaving the area. This fact may be indicative of a paradoxical effect of implicit enforcement: instead of seeing it as an opening, families feel threatened by the prospect of interference and move away from the scene. In this sense the combination of coercion and attempts to motivate clients does not appear to work, and is in need of further analysis by professionals in the field.

A second aspect of combining the two goals of providing help and combating nuisance is the individualised method of working and the essential inter-agency cooperation to achieve this. When concentrating on the homeless individual or family, it is their particular characteristics that need to be addressed and not poverty, unemployment, housing, etc. The Action Plan for Relief is a vast project with targets and procedures to ensure that the homeless subject is treated in line with eight defined life domains such as health, income, daily activities, etc., that are dealt with in an 8-step model running from intake to end of treatment (Movisie, 2008). However, what is far from clear is the extent to which the homeless actually want intervention in these domains. Similarly, the extent to which the concerted efforts of the cooperating agencies do indeed contribute to successful reintegration of the homeless, where possible, is also unclear.

The annual monitoring of the Plan generally focuses on whether targets have been achieved or not. In the individual programmes, each of the four municipalities sets targets for numbers and results in terms of a stable mix: suitable housing, income, and care over a three-month period. Of the potential 10,500 homeless people, the estimates are that, in 2009, 9,750 people were taking part in a programme, and about 5,900 people have achieved a stable mix (Maas & Planje, 2010). This indicates that targets have been achieved, but unfortunately nothing is known about the effects on the individual client or about the dynamics behind the figures (how many new homeless people have been reported, how many are returning clients, what are the long-term effects, etc.). The problem is that one of the cornerstones of the plan, i.e. the individualised programme, is eventually nothing more than a number without there being any understanding of how it works in practice. If, for instance, the stable mix indicates the number of people off the street and now living in hostels or protected housing, it is only saying that the goal of decreasing the number of homeless people on the streets has been achieved, but it says nothing about the quality of life of these people. Homelessness might have become less visible and less of a nuisance, but the problems of the homeless in terms of participating in society may still be the same.

Our case studies showed that evicted families are offered support and guidance in programmes that may last for two years. Sometimes they manage to keep their home, and in other cases there may be an offer of a new home under certain conditions of control and guidance. It was very difficult to obtain an estimate of the success rate of these kinds of programmes as far as their long-term effects are concerned. We did hear that in some cases these programmes may fail, or families withdraw from them. We do not know what then happens to these families. We also saw that the influx of families into homeless care was not really warranted because the problems in some families were of a different nature (domestic violence, teenage motherhood). This indicates the need to analyse exactly what goes on within the programmes, how the intake and treatment processes are organised, how cooperation between organisations is administered, and how society is involved as a responsible partner in finding a solution to homelessness.

The third point we would like to discuss is the matter of registration in the context of justice and punishment. This is generally rather extraordinary: although policymakers have been saying, for some twenty years, that having information about numbers and profiles of homeless people, as well as about care provision is essential, this information is still not available.

In the early 2000s, national policy required registration systems to be set up, but this requirement was abandoned in 2005 (Christiaans et al., 2008), and registration has been taken up as a means to account for budgetary flows. In the meantime, several registration systems have been developed, both nationally and locally, but these systems are not attuned to each other. In fact, national and local figures are simply not available, and the call for registration continues.

We also concluded from our case studies that a national registration system is desirable. However, we added that registration can be used for different goals: policymakers need registration on a higher level of aggregation to know the size of the target groups, the number of available facilities, etc. However, professionals may require different data on the programmes or on cooperation with partners. These goals may not be compatible, and may even have different effects in the field. It is possible, for instance, that a nationwide registration system may actually deter homeless people: once in the system, a person does not easily get out of it, and the data may stigmatise those in the system, or even worse, for the rest of their lives. This may also be the case with more locally developed systems whose intention is to monitor the homeless on their programmes. Neither is it out of the question that registration data could be used to promote a public safety campaign of more control and coercion because the targets and target groups would be clearly defined. So the matter of registration is far from being innocuous or purely technical in nature, and the conditions under which registration is used must be carefully determined.

This discussion on some of the results in the theoretical framework of punitive control or justice attempted to show the gaps in the Dutch debate on homelessness, in which the coexistence of both these principles is too readily espoused. In our own case studies we found worrying or even contradictory effects of coercion and control on three levels. The first is the adverse effect of coercion on the one hand, and the motivating effect for accepting help on the other. A consequence may be that families shy away from help, and that new forms of exclusion result. The second pertains to the workings of individualised programmes as opposed to the targets of getting people off the streets. One effect might be that homeless people are less visible because they have housing, but that the quality of their lives has barely improved at all: they have simply got housing and nothing else. The third has to do with the matter of registration, which can be set up and used in quite different ways depending on the goals of control or support. An undesirable consequence of registration may be that data are gathered for policy goals such as targeting.

It is therefore important that not only the goals and interventions of policies be analysed, but also the way the problem is 'framed' (Goffman, 1974). In our case, the framing of homelessness as something to be solved in terms of 'getting the homeless off the street' combined with combating nuisance may indicate a more control-oriented perspective rather than a justice approach. This may be more the case when housing is offered with socio-psychological care as the dominant support (as is the case in the Netherlands), ignoring other aspects of societal insertion such as work, income and social networks.

We do not want to imply that Dutch policies on homelessness are a fine example of coercion and control. What we do mean is that the mix of control and justice is a very precarious one, and that it is difficult to develop ways of working in which forms of control or pressure are really in the best interests of the homeless, as evidenced by the long-term effects of professional support and intervention. We have indicated some elements that point to the risks of an implicit consensus on the coexistence of both control and justice. We hope that our discussion of the case studies from this viewpoint will contribute to its theoretical and practical development. As such it may also inspire the necessary debate amongst professionals and policymakers about the sustainability of the mix of both approaches.

Conclusion

This article places the case of the Dutch policy on homelessness in an international context where changes in the demographics of the homeless population and in homelessness policy have taken place. It was not clear whether changes in the homeless population were related to the different types of welfare states, but remarkably some convergent trends in policy between countries could be detected: strategies such as housing first and an emphasis on a decentralised local approach are increasingly evident. But this convergence also seems to be linked to the question as to whether the policy on homelessness is based more on a public security perspective and therefore on a more coercive approach, or on a justice perspective where the interests of the homeless are taken care of in an all-encompassing way. As we have analysed in our case studies, the possible mix of both these perspectives can be contested. We have seen that the debate on these perspectives is practically non-existent in the Netherlands, and we have attempted to analyse our own studies on (the prevention of) homeless families within this framework.

In order to make this analysis more solid we offered an overview of the developments in the Dutch policy on homelessness, and we presented the results of our studies. We then placed these results in the punishment and/or justice context, and found indications on three levels that the mix of coercion and justice is not self-evident and may even lead to new forms of exclusion because of the imprudent use of coercion and control: homeless families disappear from sight because they withdraw from implicit coercion or from support and guidance programmes. Figures in terms of targets take no notice of the mechanisms of what works for whom and leave quality of life of the homeless out of the picture. The matter of registration, even when used as a tool for professionals, also seems to be caught between the contradictory effects of data gathering for policy purposes or professional support. Therefore, our analysis showed that it is necessary to take up the debate in order to clarify the possible contaminating consequences of a poorly considered acceptance of the mix.

In addition to this conclusion, we would also like to point out a corollary of this mix. At the start of this article we mentioned a new orthodoxy (Fitzpatrick & Christian, 2006) in the theory about homelessness: individual *and* structural factors should be considered, and this should imply that both factors are also dealt with in the field of policy and professional interventions. We have however seen in the Dutch case that there has been an implicit shift towards individual factors, also when dealing with homeless families. The emphasis on individual programmes and on inter-agency cooperation to make this effective has produced an approach that deals with certain characteristics of the homeless and is not directed at the potential factors such as unemployment, the housing market, education or at the societal discourse on the nature of homelessness. The stress on the public security aspect of the problems of homeless people may reinforce this more individualistic approach, in which 'blaming the victim' or putting the homeless away may become more dominant than the dimension of looking to remediate or even solve homelessness. It would be interesting to see if these developments are also to be found in other countries, if the mix between punishment and justice is evolving along different or convergent lines, depending on how the welfare states are set up, particularly in times of financial crisis. Further research into the complexities of this policy would be a welcome supplement to the theoretical approach of the new orthodoxy.

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