

# What Can be Learned from the Biographies of the Ljubljana Homeless People for Policy Formation in the Field of Homelessness

## Kaj se lahko iz biografij ljubljanskih brezdomcev naučimo za oblikovanje politik na področju brezdomstva

*Špela Razpotnik*

### *Abstract*

Špela Razpotnik, PhD in social pedagogy, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, e-mail: spela.razpotnik@guest.arnes.si

*The article brings results of a research project, within which ten case studies of the homeless of Ljubljana were made. Confidential contact with them was established within the framework of the action-research development of a new organization for help and self-help of homeless. The data analysis defined the key – homelessness related - topics of the dealt with biographies, and finally classified them into four thematic groups: housing, the significance of social networks, peer groups and mobility, as well as the importance of the inclusion of the homeless into productive activities. These key themes were instrumental in forming the proposals for the future development of homelessness policies.*

**Key words:** *homelessness, Ljubljana, case studies, shelters, field work.*

**Povzetek**

*Članek prinaša rezultate raziskave, del katere je tudi deset študij primera, opravljenih med ljubljanskimi brezdomci. Zaupen odnos s sodelujočimi v raziskavi je bil vzpostavljen v okviru akcijske raziskave oblikovanja nove organizacije za pomoč in samopomoč brezdomcev Kralji ulice. Analiza podatkov je privedla do ključnih z brezdomstvom povezanih tem, ki se dotikajo desetih biografij. Te ključne teme so klasificirane v štiri tematske skupine: nastanitev, pomen socialnih mrež, pomen vrstniške skupine in socialne mobilnosti za brezdomce ter pomembnost vključenosti brezdomcev v produktivne aktivnosti. Omenjene ključne teme so izhodišča pri oblikovanju politik na področju brezdomstva.*

**Ključne besede:** brezdomstvo, Ljubljana, študije primera, zavetišča, terensko delo.

**Introduction**

The homelessness related initiatives in Slovenia has been until recently focused only on providing basic material goods (food, clothes and – to limited extent - temporary accommodation in shelters). Many of those initiatives are traditionally linked with charity and are governed by church. Only one ministry (Ministry for work, family and social affairs) and some municipalities are funding homelessness-related programmes. In Slovenia's capital Ljubljana the issue of homelessness is the most visible and challenging and so it comes to no surprise that one can find the biggest number of homelessness related initiatives in the municipality of Ljubljana. Till now there has been not much effort devoted to developing a comprehensive and sustainable homelessness policy in Slovenia. In the last few years as a response to the growing extent, visibility of homelessness and pluralisation of its forms, some new organizations have been founded, developing new kind of programmes like drop-in centres, publishing a street paper, programmes of social inclusion, informal trainings, employment

support, mentoring (Dekleva et al. 2007; Rapuš Pavel and Razpotnik, 2007). These initiatives differ from former ones especially in regard to participation of homeless people and to the professionalisation of the programmes. A new awareness has emerged also in public regarding understanding and recognizing homelessness as a serious problem of our society. The street paper *Kralji ulice* (Kings of the street) with its relatively broad circulation and predominantly positive public reception contributes greatly to this new understanding.

If we are to understand and react to social phenomena, these should first be defined. However, the definitions of homelessness and related social phenomena are diverse and often contradictory. The basic difference between definitions is in ascribing reasons of homelessness to structural or individual factors<sup>1</sup>. According to the research by Boydell, Goering and Morrell-Bellai (2000), interaction between personal, social, economic and help-system factors is essential for the understanding of homelessness. Their study, based on in-depth interviews with the homeless, confirms that homelessness is much more than having nowhere to live. The authors specifically focused on the aspect of damage to individual's identity, self-esteem and self-efficiency.

Structural definitions attribute homelessness to social reasons, especially changes in labour market, housing market, social care system, subventions, etc., as well as to wider demographic changes. Homelessness being related to housing problems by definition, housing market is usually believed to be the essential factor contributing to this phenomenon (Liddiart and Hudson, 1998). The situation differs from one European country to another, although some trends are similar. Over the recent decades, several European states have been facing dramatic decrease regarding accessibility of such housing that vulnerable population groups – the young, underprivileged, people without adequate social networks – could afford, so in the private as in the public sphere of supply. Homelessness being closely linked to accessibility of lodging leads to individual purchasing power as another highly significant factor, defining this phenomenon. Hence it follows that the next two

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the basic opposition between structural and individual explanations other conceptions take into account also other dimensions and specificities. Edgar (2006) mentions four kinds of etiological factors: structural, institutional, relational and individual.

significant factors, explaining homelessness, are unemployment and low wages (caused by the vast supply of manpower on labour market). According to the authors' opinion (Ibid.), these two factors are the ones decisively contributing to the increase of homelessness in the last two decades, so in Europe as in the United States. Another important factor is the system of social welfare which has been curtailed in Europe in the last twenty years, thus becoming less favourable for many vulnerable groups, especially young people.

Individual factors, applied to the definition of homelessness, are individual traits of the homeless and their kin. The most frequently used personality factors are: non-attachment to home, the experience of having lived in an institution or some kind of care, psychic or sexual abuse, mental disease, crime, and alcohol or drug abuse. All these factors are often really closely related to homelessness, although authors disagree over the nature and interpretation of this relation. The problem often starts with the definition of cause and effect. Is (non)involvement into criminal activities the cause of homelessness or its consequence (will an individual having lost his usual resources resort to other sources, be they legitimate or not?). Phenomena related to homelessness can apparently not be clarified on the basis of causality; on the contrary, it is necessary to apply the perspective of circularity along with simultaneous and mutual effect of different circumstances upon individual's life sphere. Reasons are just as diverse as results; consequently, solutions for the problem of homelessness should be varied too, striving for an integral and multidisciplinary approach.

Hallebone (1997, quoted by Boydell, Goering and Morrell-Bellai, 2000) studied 38 homeless men ethnographically and found that their psychosocial identities tend to be fragmented. An additional group of 30 homeless young people were found to suffer a marginality of psychosocial identity. She found that the extent to which alternatives to homelessness were perceived depended on the construction and deconstruction of a collective culture and identity of homelessness. Attribution of meanings to one's life situation is of course supra-individual, but the meanings used for self-understanding and self-presentation of an individual are taken from symbolic interactions with the wider environment, in conformity with the understanding of symbolic interactionism. Two findings proceed from this: biographies of homeless people; events, reported

and described by the homeless in our talks, must not be understood objectively, but rather as constructions of meaning in response to certain contexts and interactions. The second finding or starting-point for the understanding of such stories is that a homeless person's social position is of key value for the understanding of his identity and therefore it is the precious and necessary starting point for developing politics to combat homelessness.

## **The purpose and method of the research project**

The research study »Problems of homelessness in Ljubljana«, financed by the Municipality of Ljubljana, was carried out in the period 2005-2006. The study was based on several research approaches (Dekleva and Razpotnik, 2007; Razpotnik and Dekleva, 2007), one of these having been case studies approach. The purpose of this approach was to gain an in-depth insight into participants' life stories, and to gather information on specific homelessness-related topics, relevant for the social policy. Homelessness topics needed to be identified so that action guidelines leading to the increase of this population's quality of life could be outlined on their basis.

Ten case studies were made. Participants were selected according to two key principles. Our wish was to include diverse biographies leading to different accents and exposing many possible life circumstances, related to homelessness, or many different types/ways/forms of this phenomenon. We made sure to provide adequate diversity and comparability to wider population of the homeless in accordance with the following variables: gender, mental health problems, alcoholism, illegal drugs addiction, age, duration of homelessness, institutional career, social relations, type and form of homelessness and possible peculiarities. Only those individuals of both sexes were selected with whom (confidential) contacts were established.

The case studies were prepared within action research activities, aimed at development of a new organization for help and self-help of the homeless, which started issuing the first Slovene street paper named *Kralji ulice* (Kings of the street). The project began with extensive field work which was carried on even after the organization was already established and the street paper regularly published. In the process of field work and action research, the researchers got

a relatively thorough insight into lives of the ten selected persons, including their life setting, lifestyle, everyday activities and people they live and associate with. The knowledge of their external world provides better insight into their subjective realities. The individuals having participated in the case studies were in fact our co-workers in different joint projects, mostly related to the project of production and sale of the street paper *Kralji ulice*. Other similar projects were a creative writing workshop, a drama group, furnishings of the daily distribution centre, and projects concerning our collaborators' life problems (obtaining personal documents, search for lodging ...).

Among the 10 selected persons there were:

- three women and seven men;
- seven users of legal or illegal drugs, three non-users;
- two under 30, three over 50 years old;
- two out of ten stayed in an educational institution in childhood, six were imprisoned, five were on psychiatric treatment and five participated in drug detoxifying programs;
- their total duration of being homeless in their life was between 4 and 15 years.

There was attempt to include both genders, various age groups, and both shelter users and avoiders, also homeless people in different points of their life circles. The comparison of data concerning the 10 selected homeless and the 107 homeless people, questioned in a field survey in 2005 (Dekleva and Razpotnik, 2007) indicates the sample of the selected 10 persons to be quite comparable by age; however, according to most other indicators it represents a rather more vulnerable and at-risk group. We believe this is a sufficiently representative sample of all the homeless living in Ljubljana, although it may be slightly more representative of those with longer duration of being homelessness.

Data analysis was based on qualitative approaches. For most of the participants, extensive materials were collected, for some even as many as 100 typewritten pages (comprising interviews, autobiographies, documents, field work observations, etc.). With the purpose of making a survey of findings in the present article, each case study identified relevant and characteristic homelessness-related topics, which were to some degree specific for a case study

and possibly differed from those of other case studies. Table 1 shows these topics according to the 10 dealt with persons. Subsequently, these topics were brought together into four sets of key thematic fields and a special set of other non-classified topics; all the topics will be separately interpreted on the following pages.

## Findings

Different topics were exposed in the described biographies. Each story opened up more key themes – some were common, some rather unique. The main topics of individual biographies are listed in the table 1. Some are related to individuals’ life situations, others verbalize their strong points and potential sources, still others expose major threats or show possible forms of professional response.

*Table 1: Key topics opened by individual case studies.*

Name of the person, sex and approximate age:	Selected key themes:
Anka, F, 25	particularities of young homeless people obstacles to transition into independent life male – female relationship and related dependencies acceptability to interventions in the early stages of homelessness
Damjana, F, 50	living in shelter women - minority population in shelter lack of post-hospital habitation facilities lack of alternative habitation facilities (to shelter)
Darko, M, 50	inaccessibility of cheap, non-profitable apartments lack of alternative accommodation facilities to shelter fear of future, poverty, lack of subsistence social isolation the need of support in the process of coping with housing market
Darmin, M, 25	role of criminal career and culture »revolving door effect« (moving from institution to institution with in-between periods of living outside institutions) life in prison the need of support in the process of coping with housing market the need to work with families substance addiction problem participation (in productive/creative/inclusive social activities) non-formal, informal and accessible education



nadaljevanje tabele:

Jani, M, 55	abstinence from drugs on street lack of social networks; social isolation inadequate living conditions in shelter lack of alternative accommodation facilities to shelter inaccessibility of cheap, non-profitable accommodation for an individual the need of mobile field work the importance of inclusion into new productive activities/social networks
Janko, M, 55	imprisonment lack of meaningful daily activities differentiated social and cultural interests problems of looking for jobs without having a place to live the importance of inclusion into new productive activities/social networks social isolation
Jernej, M, 35	daily homelessness institutional career (extra familial education) substance addiction problems health problems vicious circle, repetitions and lack of vision
Primož, M, 40	permanent stay in shelter passivation chronic homelessness the connection with the peer group
Tim, M, 40	homelessness in a small or big town (comparing both experiences) mental health problems uprootedness (institutional career, extra familial education) the importance of supported apartments and temporary forms of lodging the usefulness of the social role of a mental patient the importance of inclusion into new productive activities/social networks
Viktorija, F, 55	the importance of local community networks (community, compensation of home) generational transmission of social problems social isolation housing problem at old age the importance and options of field work

The selected key topics are diverse, leading into different directions of thinking. Some expose the peculiar features of homeless life, others emphasize key systemic and individual problems, threatening the discussed persons. Together they give rise to new ideas for the formation of policies and programmes in work with the underprivileged population groups.

The key topics were summed up into four major groups or sets, based on the similarity of contents. The first group concerns the wider problem of **housing**, a highly important topic from the viewpoint of a homeless person, affecting the possibility of individual's inclusion



into other life spheres (acquisition of personal documents, health care, employment, intimate life, interpersonal relations ...). The second group of key themes focuses on **peer group** and **chronic homelessness**. The third group also deals with major themes, related to broader **social networks**, and the fourth highlights the **importance of inclusion of the homeless into productive activities**, giving purpose to their everyday life and potentially affecting other spheres of their lives.

## Housing

The first group of findings, concerning the possibility of housing, focuses on the existing services in the field of homelessness, discussing their benefits as well as their increased and improved supply in the recent decade. On the other hand, a vast field of needs remains unfulfilled. These are mostly specific needs of individual subgroups, calling for a more flexible and differentiated services in the sphere of homelessness.

An obvious finding, supported by all case studies is that a wider spectrum of housing facilities for the homeless is needed; in fact this is true with all the dealt with cases. For example, supported types of housing are needed for specifically threatened groups (i.e. Tim, Darko, Jani, Damjana and Viktorija). Socially vulnerable young people are not given sufficient support in gaining housing independence (i.e. Anka, Darmin). Young people without parental financial support, that are not participating in the typical and normatively planned educational, working and leisure time structures, find it very hard to attain independence in terms of housing. Jones (2003) is talking about the same problem in UK context when she says that »young people are expected to support their own transition to adulthood, through their incomes. When these are not sufficient, they should defer their transition to independent housing, or obtain subsidies from their parents. State support should not be providing this subsidy. At least, this is the argument of the Right«. In our case there are also insufficient services supply for the grown-up young, especially those having insufficient or none family support and other problems with social integration (Anka, Darmin, Jernej). The existing housing facilities is only suitable for the most

risky forms like homeless illegal drug addicts (shelter for homeless drug addicts), which means that a young person that ends up in a drug addicts shelter for lack of other housing facilities, risks 'social infection' from the part of addicts (i.e. Anka, Jernej). A shelter is of course also too ultimate and hopeless form of existence for some young homeless people (Primož) and is more »better than nothing« answer to the housing problem.

Another topic within this framework is the considerable lack of alternative and post-treatment housing, along with supported apartments, half-way houses and other forms of transitory lodging. Other equally delicate themes are obstacles to independence, specific needs of the certain vulnerable social groups - the young, women, families, the need of supporting homeless people in the process of their coping with the housing market, e.g. renting own apartment.

Considering the fact that the homeless (be they young, women, families, addicts or non-addicts) in Ljubljana (with the exception of two small shelters) are completely at the mercy of private apartment owners or the private housing market, it turned out to be necessary to assist them in finding appropriate housing (Darko, Darmin), as well as to intervene on their behalf and to act as a link between them and apartment owners. Especially individuals that are not trustworthy in public opinion, e.g. single older men and women, as well as the young who are not students, are often in a disadvantaged position regarding apartment or room searching. Such individuals can be additionally stigmatized by apartment owners due to their untidy appearance or lack of social networks (someone to accompany and support them). They are not only financially but also socially underprivileged as they do not fit into the image of a humble and tidy lodger.

Special chapter within the problem of housing should be dedicated to the habitation of aged and debilitated homeless, as well as the homeless released from hospital treatment (Damjana, Viktorija, Jani). It is very difficult to find a place in old people's homes for the poor and financially unprovided for people; on the other hand, such institutions will not always be the best option for them. Lack of facilities for debilitated and ill homeless people has for a long time been one of the major complaints of workers in the Ljubljana shelters, that are in charge of the homeless needing special care. Better coordination of shelters with health care centres and home nursing service is needed, along with permanent presence of these

services in certain forms of habitation facilities for the homeless. Each of these institutions tries to compensate as best as it can for the deficiencies of the present systemic regulation.

Temporary shelters are too hopeless form of habitation, which again speaks in favour of more specialized and differentiated forms of housing facilities. This is also true in the sense that there are no attempts which would help to develop new life-visions in lives of the homeless, including demands for activities enabling them to settle their lives. But the fact remains that this low-standard form of habitation is still needed – but only to the extent, that there are no other housing possibilities and policies.

For those chronically homeless who lost vision of change and are not even capable of it due to their psychophysical condition, the low-threshold program of reduction of the negative consequences of homelessness and of assuring certain quality of life, inasmuch as it is possible, continues to be the first and most important option. Among individuals included into our studies and presented in the chapter dealing with life stories, no one was incapable of change and unmotivated. The »chronicity« of homelessness and risk for it may vary amongst them, yet their situation is by no means hopeless.

Nevertheless it is necessary to strive for such forms of motivation and housing conditions that would stimulate independence and autonomy with those physically and mentally capable of it. Although external motivation is often not sufficient for changes, the supply of wider spectrum of accommodation forms, aiming at resettlement of the homeless, would mean a basis for more optimism and better options for their future. Such mobility is a complex phenomenon of course, and should be supported with adequate systemic, housing, urban-planning, economic, employment, social, health care and other policies. The institutions in charge of these policies should get together and assume their respective responsibility for the solving of the unfavourable situation of the people suffering from permanent exclusion. Cases of good practice in this field vary from state to state in terms of success and elaborateness. »Housing first« is one of the foremost principles of the policy, striving for improved housing conditions amongst different groups of threatened and excluded people, this being the basis for further settling of life. The urban-planning policy should strive to distribute apartments and houses for socially deprived all over towns to avoid the principle of segregation.

It is important to provide for low-interest and easily accessible housing loans, which would enable unemployed and people living on social aid, to find a permanent housing solution. Good examples in this field are the Norwegian *Husbanken* or Housing Bank or Danish City Pool Programme (Benjaminsen and Tosi, 2007), which developed a system of easily accessible and low-interest loans for the poorest and underprivileged. Norway with its interdisciplinary approach to the solving of the issue of homelessness developed a model example, presented in the year 2006 to other European states as an example of good and possibly generally applicable practice. Models of shelters and similar models, supporting the segregation of the extremely excluded without offering permanent solutions, are only a temporary solution of acute cases from the standpoint of the above described model. Once they become a permanent solution for an individual, their original purpose is lost, pointing to the lack of more adequate, wider systemic solutions.

## **Peer group and social mobility**

It has been found that the role of peer group with the homeless, especially those permanently homeless, is two sided. On the one hand it is of crucial value and can essentially improve the life quality of a homeless person (i.e. Primož, Darmin ...), bringing meaning to everyday life, leading to more creative ways of leisure time spending and being generally useful (from information supply to small favours). On the other hand, a peer group can even be a threatening factor with the change of individual's status and his vertical social mobility. Hence the determined statements of some of the homeless, especially addicts, that peer group should at any rate be avoided once a person is through with his former lifestyle (i.e. Darmin), as memories of old behaviour patterns are quickly reawakened and reactivated in old surroundings. However, there are also cases deviating from this rule, proving that influence of a peer group upon sticking to old behaviour patterns can sometimes be a mere excuse, rather than a true obstacle to change (Jani, Janko). Nevertheless, there are different types of social relations, applicable to different purposes; if a peer group represents an important instrument of survival on street, it is hardly likely to contribute to

individual's social change. Many of our participants mentioned conflicts in one's peer group, provoked by an individual that starts striving for a change of his status. Likewise, it is an interesting fact that many homeless people (not all – in our studies there have only been two such cases) were familiar with homelessness before becoming homeless themselves. In the beginning their relations with the peer group may have been only occasional, but once they left or lost home, they quickly turned into »full time« members. In other words – membership of a peer group of homeless people is frequently an unfavourable prognostic factor of later homelessness. It should also be emphasized that many individuals that later turned into homeless people, were born and spent their youth in peripheral neighbourhoods for poor and »redundant« people, so their marginal status must have been dragging on through several generations.

## **Importance of social networks**

According to Martinjak (2004), social networks are the most important basis of survival. The relevance of this claim can directly or indirectly also be observed on our cases.

The greatest problem of homelessness, as observed in the studies, are social networks, or rather, their lack of and exclusion from, along with momentary and potential loneliness, as well as abandonment. This problem can be related to generational transmission of exclusion (i.e. Jernej, Viktorija ...), to long-lasting imprisonment (Janko), to long-lasting treatment programmes (Jernej), to long-lasting addiction (Darmin, Jernej, Jani, Primož, Anka ...) or to mental health problems (Darko, Tim). Moreover, importance of social networks is also related to lack of strong and binding social ties, reaching into the early periods of life - symbolic uprootedness (Tim). All this contributes to the anxiety over future (Darko, Tim, Darmin, Viktorija, Damjana ...), great uncertainty as well as too great (unrealistic) hope (the cases of Jernej, Primož, Darmin). The great importance of social networks as well as fatality of their deficiency opens up a new field of work in the sphere of social networks – team work, project work, field work, as well as work with families, employers and institutions; briefly, any activities, supporting existing ties between a homeless person and his surroundings, mediating between the two sides in

crucial moments and compensating for the lost, non-functioning and non-existing social networks. »Associating, joint activities, sincere and strong social contacts provide support and ground to community members for the compensation of possible deficits« (Jeriček, 2004).

## **Importance of inclusion into productive activities**

The following set of conclusions refers to the analyzed significance of including the homeless into productive activities. These could be the activities the homeless are explicitly invited to participate in and contribute to their shaping. At the same time, these activities generate new social networks for the quality of their life (be it a life of a homeless person or a new, gradually changing life). The important fact is that including of the homeless into different activities - publishing of a street paper for example – serves as an ideal medium of mutual acquaintance, as well as an excellent catalyst of changes and visions of future. Adjusting activities to life of the homeless people is of crucial importance, meaning symbolic recognition of their experience and world. It is also an excellent basis for further cooperation. Such form of cooperation is highly demanding regarding time and energy, bringing together people in all their complexity and vulnerability. Participation in activities, specifically tailored to their needs, offers different possibilities to the homeless – from testing and developing their skills and abilities in safe surroundings to free expression of their opinions, feelings and problems. All this contributes to their general social participation, expanding its extent, strengthening the feeling of self-confidence and autonomy, and offering the possibility to acquire wide range of life-important experience. Because of the nature of our approach (participatory action research) we have had a lot of experiences with co-working in different projects with all ten homeless people from our sample. Due to the nature of our cooperation, inclusion of the homeless into productive activities was relevant in all the ten cases. This form of cooperation and work with the homeless proved useful, although – as already mentioned – highly demanding in terms of time, energy and expertise.

No less important than inclusion is timely »exclusion« from projects, concerning work with the homeless; in fact, upward mobility would be a more appropriate word than exclusion. The purpose of work with

the homeless is to achieve a state when services and projects, aimed at the homeless, will no longer be needed. Therefore, permanent efforts for increasing autonomy and independence are needed, as well as for more efficient networking with other organizations and projects, so that a homeless person could join in when feeling ready. One of the factors which makes upward mobility difficult is the high fluctuation of users of services for the homeless, as well as their unsettled and »circling« nature (which is not their inner quality, but rather a consequence of the system of help, reduced to several partial supplies at different places, lacking integration into an efficient whole, part of this being the revolving door effect). If the ten homeless people in our sample are also more stable and settled in their relations and ties, this certainly doesn't apply to everyone. Another frequent reason of (self) exclusion from joint activities are mutual rivalries, individual's wish for a specific status with regard to other users, and corresponding institutional inability to cope with users' great expectations.

As the homeless are individuals, excluded from different spheres of life, durable and persistent efforts are necessary to achieve results. Therefore, professionalization of workers in this field is of vital importance. The belief, all too widely spread in our cultural setting, that lay, charity and voluntary work with homeless people is sufficient, should be overcome. Volunteers are of course most welcome in work with vulnerable population groups, but only under professional guidance. Increase of professional supply, promotion of preventive work, expansion of joint projects, participation of wider public and above all interdisciplinary approach of different ministries will in time bring about gradual lowering of financial and social costs of work with vulnerable groups. Alleviating of the negative effects of homelessness or »fire extinguishment« is of course necessary, but insufficient and not contributing to long-term positive changes.

## **Other findings**

Amongst the key findings, a few specific fields within the wider problem of homelessness should be stated, claiming our attention with defining and preparation of supply and programmes in the sphere of homelessness. These are:

- Gender and generation related particularities amongst the



homeless should be taken into account in planning services.

- For homeless drug addicts and users of mental health services (Tim, Darmin, Anka, Darko, Jernej, Viktorija), a special role of a psychiatric patient develops which in the wider society enable them to enjoy special advantages and a privileged status on the one hand; yet, on the other hand, these very benefits bind them to the identity of patients and addicts, entitled to support due to addiction, instead of stimulating self-initiative and wish for change.
- Individuals involved in crime and the problem of criminalization of addicts, as well as of (especially after the latest Law on Public Order and Peace) homeless people or »vagrants« deserve special attention. Criminalization and consequently imprisonment of the homeless are indeed a major part of their lives, although mostly a counter-productive and wasted part. For the homeless, financial and social debts aggravate the chances of their social integration (Darmin, Jernej). Imprisonment and absence of permanent lodging make it impossible for an individual (officially and physically) to seek employment; moreover, a regular working relation implies that past debts would be obligatory reimbursed from their earnings – even without their consent. Due to all this, such individuals hardly ever strive to find regular employment. Indebtedness keeps the society and individual apart, each persistently sticking to his side (one to repayment, the other to despair and resignation).
- Daily homelessness as a form of homelessness, typical of individuals who do have a home (or rather a roof over their head), but cannot stay there, are not attached to it or do not perceive it as a safe basis; they have to seek safety and belonging outside home, although – due to their own uprootedness and incapability for making and keeping social relations – this usually turns out to be a hardly attainable goal. Daily homelessness is often a preparatory stage for permanent homelessness, and these individuals are certainly exposed to the danger of repeating vicious circles (Jernej, Darmin, Anka, Damjana, Viktorija ...) of unsuccessful solution seeking and inability to move. An individual lacking any idea and experience of home, together with adherence, is certainly not very likely to find and develop them.

## Conclusion

A research was done on ten cases of homeless people in Ljubljana in the period in time when public awareness of homelessness in Slovenia has just begun to grow. This period is characterized by recognizing only the basic needs of homeless people and having the conception that they would be deserving only the very basic material help and that any more ambitious forms of support would be impossible and/or useless. At the end of this period we are beginning to recognize the needs for homelessness policies to be developed and the need for more complex and multi-sectorial responses to be implemented. »The establishment of new units requires the cooperation of many agencies and different levels of government« (Benjaminsen and Tosi, 2007).

Starting from this background the aim of our research was to develop proposals for homelessness policies based on the needs, experiences and biographies of ten Ljubljana's homeless people. These proposals for further tackling the problem of homelessness are mainly focused on flexible, more individualized and user-centered forms of work, enabling each individual to set out on the path of social mobility and integration at his own speed. Policies and services can only be successful if based on individual needs, which can be perceived, recognized and defined through dialogue with users. Inclusion not being a one-way but a two-way process and further recognition of the homelessness as a serious and multidimensional social problem and the settlement of quality standards of the growing number of units are important issues in tackling homelessness.

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*Empirical article, submitted for translation in January 2008.*