Media Representations of Homelessness and the Link to (Effective) Policies : The Case of Slovenia

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❯ **Abstract_** *This article examines media representations of homelessness in Slovenia, because the media are, it is argued, one of the most important actors in the 'construction' of this social problem. How homelessness is perceived and what its causes are thought to be influences the types of policy that are viewed as acceptable in a country and how they are evaluated, or how effective they seem. The article starts by presenting the development of policies and services in Slovenia. It then describes the findings of the media analysis of three main Slovene newspapers in the year 2007. It focuses on the trends and fluctuations in articles on homelessness and on their broad content, discussing the implications of these media portrayals of homelessness for our understanding of the phenomenon and policy responses. The main specific finding on Slovenia is the apparent absence of the state as an important actor in newspaper articles on this issue, which corresponds with the absence of homeless people as a specific group within national housing policies.*

❯ **Key words_** *Homelessness ; Slovenia ; media analysis ; social problems ; social constructionism*

"*Whether or not a situation is perceived as a political problem depends on the narrative in which it is discussed.*" *(Hajer, 1993 ; quoted in Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi, 2003 ; p.429)*

Introduction

Homelessness is recognised in all European countries as a social problem that welfare states need to address. This is also evident at the European policy level, with homelessness requiring to be addressed within national Social Inclusion Strategies. However, no coordinated European-wide policies on homelessness have been introduced, and the phenomena is defined and addressed in different ways in various member states. The 2005 European Union (EU) strategy on Social Protection and Social Inclusion included the ensuring of a 'decent dwelling' to all citizens as one if its seven key priorities, but also said that this priority could be achieved in various ways in individual member states. Improved housing standards, improved access to social housing, or the implementation of programmes to tackle homelessness (European Commission, 2005b) were among the options available. These different approaches to homelessness are sometimes due to 'real' differences in the housing, institutional and welfare context between countries, but they may also be associated with varying perceptions and definitions of the problem.

It is thus important to know how homelessness is perceived within individual countries and what its causes are thought to be, as this is likely to influence the types of policy that are viewed as acceptable and how they are evaluated – in other words, how effective they seem. The effectiveness of homelessness policies and programmes is often considered in a relatively narrow 'before and after' intervention basis (Flatau *et al*., 2006). These evaluations rely heavily on an assumed understanding of the definition of the problem and the proposed solutions to it. However, it is often helpful to consider the effectiveness of policies in the wider context of the perception and definition of the problem. The Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries present an interesting case study, as their homelessness policies have been developed relatively recently, after 1990 in the case of Slovenia. Therefore, they enable observation of both the development of perceptions and definitions of homelessness, and the influence of these factors in the policy and public arena.

Several authors have emphasised that housing issues are rarely debated through the theoretical perspective of the 'construction' of social problems (see e.g. Jacobs *et al*., 2003). In this paper I will analyse the homelessness problem in Slovenia using such a 'social constructionist' framework. I will focus on the media as an important agent in this process of social construction, and will analyse the media discourse on homelessness in Slovenia, linking it to the existing policy and institutional context. The structure of the papers is as follows. First I will summarise the theoretical framework which underpins my analysis. Then I will describe the development of homelessness policies and services in Slovenia. The next section of the paper outlines the methodology for the media analysis exercise I undertook, before I move on to describe the findings of this analysis (the trends and fluctuations in

articles on homelessness, and their broad content), and to discuss the implications of these media portrayals of homelessness for our understandings of the phenomenon and policy responses.

Theoretical Background

This paper starts from the premise that the recognition of certain phenomena in society as being problematic is not something inherent to the existing conditions in a society, but is instead socially constructed:

> "Social problems lie in and are produced by a process of collective definition. The process of collective definition is responsible for the emergence of social problems, for the way in which they are seen, for the way in which they are approached and considered, for the kind of remedial plan that is laid out, and for the transformation of the remedial plan in its application" (Blumer, 1971; quoted in Jacobs *et al.*, 2003; p. 429).

Jacobs *et al.* (2003) suggested that three conditions are necessary for a housing problem to be recognised and acted upon: first, a convincing narrative needs to be developed; second, a coalition of support has to be constructed; and third, this coalition needs to ensure that institutional measures are implemented. Within the context of this article, the first of these conditions – 'a convincing narrative' – is of primary interest.

How the problem is defined and what solutions are proposed to it is part of a political process, wherein various actors play an important role, and where complex power relations are played out. As Parsons (1999) emphasises, the political process is not an open one and only certain questions reach the agenda. How these questions are defined is argued to be the basis of political power (Parsons, 1999; p.126).

Public policies are influenced by external factors, like the economic, social and demographic conditions in a society as well as the policies of other countries. However, internal factors are also very important, such as existing institutional frameworks and past policies, which exert an influence due to factors such as inertia, inflexibility and existing rules of conduct (Parsons, 1999). The ideas that influence actions and behaviour are incorporated in organisations and thus may exclude alternative solutions and new ways of acting (John, 1998).

> "[E]ach particular regime of welfare contains the discursive and institutional resources which policy actors attempt to repackage when forming coalitions and networks around specific issues of social exclusion" (Arapoglou, 2004; p.105).

Furthermore, several groups of actors are involved in problem definition. The groups most commonly analysed are the political and economic elites and various interest groups. However, another important actor is the media:

> "News constitutes a shared symbolic resource for establishing who is homeless, why people are homeless, what happens when a person is homeless, who the experts are, what can be done about this social phenomenon, and who should respond." (Hodgetts *et al*., 2005; p.31).

The political agenda is determined by a combination of structural factors, the pressure exerted by policy lobbyists and the intervention of the media (Jacobs *et al.*, 2003). Parsons (1999; p.107) argues that: "With distortion of issues and creation of stereotypical threats, mass media create a context, within which the policy responses are formed, (…)". The media can therefore either facilitate new perspectives on certain issues, or can support the *status quo*. Media representations of homelessness have been analysed across a range of countries by Meert *et al.* (2004) and I will draw extensively on their work in this article as it provides a helpful comparison point with Slovenia. They have analysed how homelessness is portrayed in Spain, Luxembourg, Denmark and France and found that media reports mostly support dramatic aspects of homelessness which confirm and reproduce the dominant representations of homelessness (ibid. p.37).

As Moscowitz (2002) argues, journalism can also have an impact on public awareness, stimulating action through what is termed 'civic' or 'public' journalism.

> "[R]esearchers have long recognised that coverage of particular social problems in the mass media and the way in which they are covered can not only increase public awareness of the problem, but can also mobilise public support for certain solutions and affect policy making." (Moscowitz, 2002; p.63)

Jacobs *et al*. (2003) have demonstrated how the media portrayal of problem of lone parents and anti-social behaviour had an important impact on the policies that were applied. "Of central importance in establishing a new convincing narrative was the role of supposedly impartial commentators in the media." (Jacobs *et al*., 2003; p.436) They have also argued that the construction of social problems by the media often draws upon negative stereotyping and rhetorical strategies. However, the media is just one of a number of relevant actors, and I am not suggesting that any social problem is only discursively constructed. Social problems are also the product of existing policy processes and service development – these are described next with respect to homelessness in Slovenia.

The Development of Homelessness Policies and Services in Slovenia

Before the collapse of socialism, the state was responsible for providing citizens with housing in Slovenia[1]. The social housing sector was very well developed by the end of the 1980s (33% of dwellings were 'social rented' – owned by enterprises or local authorities (Mandič, 1994 ; p.30). Homelessness (or more precisely rooflessness) was not very common.

After Slovenia gained independence, the state withdrew from the direct provision of housing and its role has been redefined as 'enabling'. However, what has characterised housing finance and housing policy in the last two decades in general has been ad-hoc interventions and the absence of a long-term strategy (Cirman, 2007). The development of the new housing system has been slow, due to weakly defined policy instruments, poor financing and a lack of clarity with regard to the responsibilities of relevant actors (Mandič 2007, Cirman 2007). The Housing Act in 1991 introduced major changes to the housing system. However, a National Housing Programme was adopted much later, in 2000. The main instruments for vulnerable households in the housing arena in Slovenia are now : (1) permanent housing (social sector) ; (2) financial measures (loans, rent subsidies, social aid) ; and (3) temporary shelters, outreach services and similar.

The availability of social housing decreased significantly after independence, as this stock was largely sold off in the process of privatisation, and there was almost no new building in the decade that followed (see Mandič, 2007). The share of social rented housing decreased from 33% of the stock in 1991(prior to privatisation) to 13% in 1993 (Mandič, 1994 ; 30). This meant that one of the most important instruments for helping vulnerable households with their housing problems – social housing – was rarely accessible, due to very long waiting lists. In Ljubljana, for example, only approximately 10% of housing applicants received a social tenancy in 2005 (Hegler, 2006). The poor design of the financing instruments for this sector is a contributory factor ; they have only recently become more defined with the increasingly active role of the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia (see Cirman, 2007).

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[1]   The methods and measures varied in the decades after the Second World War. At first, housing provision was dependent on nationalisation of dwellings (and their re-distribution), then on municipal housing funds (based on contributions from employed residents) and later, more market-oriented building was introduced, based on private financing (Sendi, 2007, pp. 7-12 ; Mandič, 2007, pp.19-21). This resulted in some periods of intensive building (mainly high rise). However, due to continuing housing shortages, building by individuals remained very common (and was sometimes also illegal).

At the same time, access to various forms of financial support for poor citizens has been diminishing and the conditions for access have been significantly restricted in some areas[2] (Črnak Meglič, 2006). Housing loans in general are less accessible than prior to independence (Mandič, 1999). An important actor is the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia which operates a long-term savings scheme intended to enable individuals to purchase or renovate their houses. This measure was criticised for not being well focused and its importance has also diminished due to the increasing role of the banking sector (Cirman, 2007; p.82). Until recently, rental subsidies were only available to poor tenants in the social sector. However, amendments to the Housing Act in 2008 have expanded these subsidies under specified conditions ('means testing' and 'having applied for social housing but failed to receive it') to tenants in the private sector.

In contrast with the growing restrictions in financial support for poorer citizens and the decline in permanent social housing discussed above, there has been an expansion in targeted homelessness services in Slovenia in the years since independence. For example, the number of shelters and of beds in these shelters has been increasing slowly over the last decade[3] (National Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection 2007). In addition, emergency units have been developed, to provide for the most pressing cases of housing vulnerability[4]. These developments reflect the increasing vulnerability of many households in the housing sector (this has been a side effect of the diminishing housing supply for poorer groups, the increasing difficulty in getting a housing loan, high prices in the rented sector and emerging crises in the labour market due to restructuring, (see Mandič, 1999; Dekleva and Razpotnik, 2007). However, progress from shelters to more permanent accommodation remains very difficult, mainly due to the small size of the social housing sector. The 'Housing First' approach, which involves helping clients to

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[2]   Universal health services have been limited and voluntary supplementary insurance has become a condition for full access to health care. With regard to unemployment insurance, actively seeking employment is now a prerequisite for receipt of benefit. Social protection legislation has strengthened supervision over the payment of benefits, however some new rights have also been introduced (e.g. to state pensions) (Črnak Meglič, 2006; pp.19-20).

[3]   For example, in the course of a year (2006 to 2007) the number of places in shelters for homeless people increased by 35% (there are now 101 places in total), the number of places in shelters for women, victims of violence and maternity homes by 7% (312 places in total), and the number of places in supported housing by 12% (202 places in total) (National Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, 2007)

[4]   However, for now, quality and standards within shelters are not a significant part of policy or professional debates in Slovenia (in contrast to the UK, for example, see Fitzpatrick and Wygnanska, 2007).

secure a tenancy first before addressing their other needs through intensive and flexible support (see Atherton & Mcnaughton-Nicholls, this volume), is not being discussed or developed in Slovenia.

The withdrawal of the state has left more space for the development of interventions by civil society (such as NGOs) in various areas. However, the development of the NGO sector has generally been slow. Even though the number of NGOs has doubled in a ten-year period (from 1996 to 2006), the share of employment in this sector has not grown, and remains low in international terms (only 0.7% of economically active people are employed in this sector, (Kolarič *et al*., 2006)). Moreover, the focus of Slovenian NGOs is rarely on the most vulnerable groups, with only 2% of private non-profit organisations in Slovenia active in the health care field and less than 4% in the field of social protection (Kolarič *et al*., 2006).

When one observes how homelessness is described and debated in the policy documents in Slovenia, it becomes clear that homelessness is not very high on the political agenda and consequently no specific and 'holistic' homelessness policy exists. This might be partly because newly arising problems within the housing field have demanded more immediate attention (for instance, relationships among owners in high rise buildings ; denationalisation of dwellings). Homelessness in its most acute form – rooflessness – remains a relatively hidden problem and is not very widespread. In the main, it has been linked with the 'larger' cities.

Homelessness is not in the foreground of the Housing Act (2003) or the National Housing Programme (2000), which are the two most important housing policy documents in Slovenia. Housing law does not fully consider the 'social' dimension of housing (see Mandič, 2007 ; Boškić, 2003), but instead focuses on 'property rights', like owner-buyer relations, relations among the owners in multi-dwelling buildings and so on, (although some mention is made of emergency units and social housing). On the other hand, homelessness is more specifically addressed in the field of social care, for example in the National Social Protection Programme (2006-2010) and National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (recently social protection and social inclusion). The homeless are mentioned alongside other vulnerable groups that need help, and the interventions listed include various shelters.

However, it should be noted that 'the homeless' are usually separated from other groups that can also experience housing problems and where housing solutions are proposed (for example women, victims of violence and people with mental health problems). Thus, while the homeless are not specifically defined in these policy documents, it can be inferred from the context in which they are mentioned that it is a narrow definition of homelessness that is being employed, that of 'roof-lessness'. This is something that new member states have in common and which

has been already pointed out by the European Commission in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion, evaluating the National Action Plans on social inclusion (NAPs) of the new Member States (European Commission, 2005a).

To summarise, the main characteristic of homelessness policy in Slovenia is its absence. There is no coordinated action and the broader homeless group is addressed by various established welfare state interventions, while the term 'home-lessness' and measures orientated at helping homeless people focuses on a narrow definition and spectrum of measures. The measures that are implemented are mainly short-term shelters, but transition from this short term accommodation to more permanent housing is difficult.

In the next section I will analyse how the media, as one of the key agents in the construction of social problems and consequently in the construction of policies to address such problems, present the homeless, and whether they present existing policies as adequate or are critical in ways which could prompt policy change.

Methodology for the media analysis

The three main daily newspapers (those with the largest circulation) were chosen for analysis: *Slovenske novice, Dnevnik* and *Delo*[5]. The archives for 2001-2008 were searched by keyword: homeless* (slo. *brezdom**), which encompasses the words used for people (the homeless) or the status (homelessness)[6]. However, for the detailed analysis I limited the articles to the calendar year 2007. In 2007, 119 articles from *Delo*, 70 articles from *Dnevnik*, and 88 articles from *Slovenske novice* were analysed.

The conceptual approach employed was textual, discourse analysis. The articles were analysed with the goal of identifying the messages, symbols and social relations hidden in the text. Macro-textual analysis sees the verbalisation and representation of society and groups through words. These representations are seen as marking, dramatising and constructing complex social relations. This

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[5]   Delo and Dnevnik are both central-Left publications, however Slovenske novice, the newspaper with the largest circulation (published by the same company as Delo), is more sensationalist in its tabloid style approach.

[6]   The selected methodology will have influenced the results to some extent – a broader search (by reasons like eviction and domestic violence) may have yielded more articles and a broader perspective on the housing vulnerability and homelessness discourse in Slovenia. However, in this paper the focus is purely on the use of the word homeless and the discourse and meanings attached to it.

approach draws on the works of Burke, Duncan and Edelman, viewing text as symbolic action, or a means to frame a situation, define it, grant it meaning and mobilise appropriate responses to it (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994; p. 465).

I adopted a similar media analysis methodology to that used by Meert *et al.* (2004), in order to facilitate international comparisons. I also drew upon the media analysis carried out in Slovenia by Razpotnik and Dekleva (2007), for the year 2005. However, my analysis differs from those of these earlier authors in that it focuses more on the policy implications of the media representations.

The text was first analysed by the primary topic to which it was linked and the articles were sorted into categories. The next section of this paper will present the descriptive findings of this analysis, focusing on trends and fluctuations in the publication of relevant articles and the key content of these articles; it will then disaggregate these findings across the three newspapers analysed. The subsequent section will be more discursive, drawing across all three newspapers and focusing on the implications from this analysis about key dimensions of homelessness in Slovenia.

Findings of the media analysis – describing trends, fluctuations and the content of articles on homelessness in Slovenia

Over the years 2002-2007, it is difficult to detect any trend toward a rising or declining number of articles on homelessness in Slovene newspapers. In *Dnevnik*, the number of relevant articles is quite constant, albeit that an increase can be noted from 2006 to 2007. In *Slovenske novice*, a gradual increase can be noted. However, in *Delo* there has been a gradual decrease in the number of articles on homelessness, although it continued to have a significantly larger number of relevant articles than either of the other publications during 2007. It is therefore difficult to find any overall trend across these newspapers with regard to their coverage of homelessness.

Table 1: Number of articles found with the key word homeless

Year	*Delo*	*Dnevnik*	*Slovenske novice*
2001	152	--	--
2002	173	43	--
2003	152	58	--
2004	135	56	55
2005	129	57	62
2006	133	44	76
2007	119	70	88
Per month in 2007			
January	6	4	13
February	9	3	3
March	6	4	10
April	11	10	5
May	5	4	5
June	15	4	4
July	6	11	8
August	13	6	12
September	14	6	5
October	13	5	6
November	12	3	8
December	9	10	9
Total	119	70	88

Note : -- indicates that the articles from that year were not included in the electronic archive.

In *Dnevnik* there is larger seasonal fluctuation in the number of articles on homeless than in the other two newspapers, with peaks in April, July and December. There is also some fluctuation in the number of articles in *Slovenske novice*, with peaks in January, March and August. This fluctuation is something that has also been identified in other analyses. For example, in the French press there is a significant peak in the coverage of homelessness in December and January (see Meert *et al.,* 2004), while something similar has also been previously noted in Slovenia (see Razpotnik and Dekleva, 2007). In *Delo* the fluctuation is lower, the articles being quite evenly spread through the whole year.

Table 2 (below) summarises the subject matter of these articles. As can be seen, in both *Delo* and *Dnevnik*, the largest share of articles (a quarter) is found in the categories of 'activities' (both organisations and famous personalities helping the homeless), followed by space/place issues (such as those issues that are linked to places that homeless people occupy, mainly in urban areas), and information on the homeless (typically, life histories of homeless people). The distribution in the newspaper *Slovenske novice* is quite different ; here the largest share of the articles

can be classified as 'negative events' such as violence and accidents (more than a third), which corresponds to the previously mentioned sensationalist orientation of the paper. We now consider each of these categories in more detail:

Table 2: The content of articles

Categories	Delo	Dnevnik	Slovenske novice
Violence	3% (4)	10% (7)	23% (20)
Accidents	11% (13)	4% (3)	13% (11)
Helping the homeless – organisations	20% (24)	24% (17)	11% (10)
Helping the homeless – personalities	7% (8)	-	5% (4)
Information	8% (9)	20% (14)	15% (13)
Space, place	11% (13)	10% (7)	2% (2)
Policy	2% (2)	4% (3)	-
Other	38% (45)	27% (19)	32% (28)
Total	100% (118)	100% (70)	100% (88)

Note: The number in the brackets is the number of articles in the category.

Negative events (violence, accidents)

This category encompasses articles that describe homelessness in connection with accidents (for example, homeless people who have accidentally started fires in abandoned buildings), or violent events such as robberies and deaths.

The articles on violence can be distinguished on the following basis: where homeless people are victims of a violent act, which is the most common category[7]; where homeless people are the perpetrators, which is much rarer (and indicates that homeless people in general are not seen as dangerous and threatening); where violence occurs amongst homeless people (homeless people are both victims and perpetrators); and where violence did not directly involve the homeless but was happening in a place where they usually gathered.

The articles on accidents were mostly local events and were usually linked to only one homeless person; for instance a building goes up in flames because one homeless person lit a fire to warm himself. However, there were some articles about larger-scale catastrophes which left many people homeless, either locally (floods in Slovenia) or in other countries (for example, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans).

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7   This is similar to other countries, for example Spain (Meert *et al.*, 2004; p.21).

Helping the homeless (organisations, personalities)

This is the largest category containing the majority of articles. It can be sub-divided with respect to: who is providing help, and who is the recipient of that help.

There are a variety of actors described as providers of help. Most usually these are NGOs, voluntary organisations or associations, but there are also public actors such as medical institutions or centres for social work[8]. In some cases the work of individuals is presented; these are usually famous people.

Furthermore, help can be directed broadly at several groups, with homeless people just one of the groups being assisted, and where they are not specifically defined. This happens mainly in the context of poverty and deprivation. In some cases, narrower groups such as drug users, migrants, people with HIV, TB or the roofless are specified, so the help is more specifically targeted. In addition, individual stories of a single person or a family are sometimes presented, together a description of the intervention that has helped them.

Information

This category comprises articles that offer information on the homeless: research may be presented (for example, the results of a small study of homelessness in Ljubljana, or data from the US); an event, such as a football competition involving homeless people may be described[9]; or the impact of wider trends on homeless people, including issues such as the effect of the Euro – "Since Euro changed the Tolar, the homeless get up earlier in the morning and they earn less" (*Slovenske novice*, 19.1.2007).

Personal portraits and life stories of individual homeless people, which form a signifi-cant proportion of this category, are more numerous in *Slovenske novice* than in the other two newspapers. An example of such a story is an article on a homeless family entitled: "Hamster in a garage and family on the street" (*Slovenske novice*, 2.7.2007). The article described the eviction of a family, the life story of the single mother involved and how she now finds herself on the street with her two children.

Also common around holiday time are articles which contrast the comfort and well-being enjoyed by most of the population with the deprivation endured by the poor and vulnerable. For example, one article commented:

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8   Similar distinction between the two main providers of help was found in previous analysis of Slovene media (see Razpotnik and Dekleva, 2007).

9   This theme could conceivably have been placed in the category of 'helping the homeless'. However, as the football competition was presented more as a sporting event, rather than an event specifically designed to help homeless people, it was put in this category.

"The images of satisfied people in holiday commercials create an illusion that no problems exist. Along with the people with mental health problems, other groups are susceptible to these pressures, who are already lonely – the elderly, chronically ill and disabled, homeless." (*Dnevnik,* 28.12.2007).

Place/space issues

This category encompasses articles that:

a) describe individual buildings or places that are abandoned and problematic, representing a place where homeless people gather. These places and the homeless people who spend time in them are linked with potential crime or danger, some of these homeless people being portrayed as possible aggressors (for example, in one such article they were labelled 'suspicious homeless' (*Delo*, 3.10.2007)). This is the most common type of article in the category.

b) describe cities or even countries, in which homeless people are identified as a commonplace but unfortunate part of the image/experience:

"In the beginning San Francisco hardly wins your heart. The majority of European visitors are surprised by numerous homeless people on the street in the town centre, and even more so by their obvious physical and psychological decay. But they are neither dangerous nor intrusive." (*Delo*, 1.8.2007).

Or, alternatively, they are portrayed as an integral and even 'interesting' part of the city life and 'landscape':

"For some the biggest 'attraction' of the main square is a homeless person, who with a friendly "Good morning, do you have some change?" every day gets some money for a bottle of cheap wine." (*Dnevnik*, 28.7.2007).

Policies

In a small number of articles, public policies relevant to homeless people are critically discussed. These articles relate to housing problems (shortage of housing or housing policies), integration policy (for refugees), policy on mental health issues and so on. One example is an article on the Strategy of Development of Social Care until 2011 of the municipality of Ljubljana (*Delo,* 19.12.2007). The article is critical of the late adoption of the document by the city council, as well as some of it content, such as the lack of clear data on homelessness and drug abusers.

Other

This last category is very heterogeneous and encompasses articles where the homeless were not the focus of the piece and were mentioned only in passing (for example only metaphorically), or where homelessness was linked to things such as films, animals or artistic projects. This category is not relevant for our analysis, but it represents a significant proportion of the articles in all three journals (approximately one third).

Media portrayals and their implications

Some of the categorisations described above have been identified in existing literature. They are also linked to typical news media orientations (negative events and personal life stories in the example of the 'yellow press'). For example, the categories identified by Meert *et al.* (2004) in their analysis of the treatment of homelessness by the French press were charitable activities, 'studies and conferences', weather related events, Government and political actions, television programmes and shows or a miscellany (mainly comprised of reports on violence). Many of the categories, therefore, overlap with the ones identified in Slovenian press.

However, one important category – Government and political actions – is very weakly presented in Slovenian press. This seems to indicate a key difference between Slovenia and other countries with respect to the perception of homelessness. It seems not to be an issue that politicians talk about unlike, for example, that which was suggested by an analysis of the Spanish press (Meert *et al.,* 2004). Furthermore, public policies are rarely presented and critically analysed – either with respect to how they address homelessness or how they 'produce' it. This contrasts with the position in the French press (Meert *et al.,* 2004) for example, and in UK television (Hodgetts *et al*., 2005). This then, is one finding that seems specific to Slovenia.

In the remainder of this section, the Slovenian articles are re-analysed according to their implications for key questions with respect to understanding homelessness in Slovenia: *who are the homeless? ; how are their lives portrayed? ; how are interventions to assist them described? ; and how are the causes of homelessness explained?.* Unlike the previous section, this section does not distinguish between the different newspapers, but rather draws findings from across all of them.

Who are the homeless?

Homelessness was described in the articles in a very narrow sense, linked to people living on the streets, who were sometimes also referred to as '*clochards*'(slo. klošarji) in these articles. This is therefore similar to the narrow definitions that can be found in Slovene public policy documents (see above). However, we can find

even narrower definitions than rough sleeping in some articles. Where homeless-ness was the result of an eviction, for example, these households were sometimes not even perceived as homeless, but rather were put in opposition to the homeless. In one such article, a homeless family sleeping in a train station was portrayed as different from the homeless people sleeping there and were described as "almost forced to fight for their little piece of space with the clochards and the drug users" (*Slovenske novice*, 17.12.2007). When the same woman was taken to a homeless centre, she said that "that is for clochards", and that she was not a clochard and did not want to be one (*Slovenske novice*, 22.12.2007).

In only one article was it explained that homelessness is a broad concept that includes mothers in maternity homes and users of various shelters. This was the definition given by a professional working with the homeless (*Slovenske novice*, 1.3.2007). Consequently it is not surprising that the profile of the homeless in the majority of articles (if given at all) was that of an older male, often with an alcohol abuse problem, or a younger male with a drug abuse problem[10].

It is also interesting to note that immigration is an issue only rarely linked to housing or homelessness in the Slovene press, although it was in this piece:

> "Along with our kings of the street[11] and those from former Yugoslavian republics we also meet the homeless of other nationalities on the streets of Ljubljana. This is a relatively new phenomenon, that has been brought about by rising living standards in Slovenia as well as by membership of the EU" (*Dnevnik,* 11.4.2007).

Thus the issue of immigration is far less prominent than it was, for example in the Spanish newspapers analysed by Meert *et al*. (2004), which is probably linked to the relatively low levels of immigration into Slovenia.

How are homeless people's lives portrayed ?

In media portrayals, homelessness is of course most often linked to negative condi-tions such as poverty, cold or addiction problems, as was also found by Razpotnik and Dekleva (2007). However, perhaps surprisingly, many positive portrayals can also be found in the Slovene media:

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[10] There are of course articles that present other homeless groups, such as homeless families, or single mothers. In fact, Razpotnik and Dekleva (2007 ; p. 140) found in their media analysis that since there are fewer homeless women than men, women are actually over-represented in media accounts.

[11] This euphemism for the homeless has been very often used by the journalists, since the street newspaper of the homeless is called Kings of the Street.

> " Clochard, as they are named, have a special status in Slovenia. They are not
> just beggars. They do not exactly beg for money, they more suggest that we
> might give it to them. They do not hide that they will use it for a bottle of wine,
> usually white, and a pack of cigarettes. In their words there is honesty, many are
> educated, they are independent and always proud " (Dnevnik, 20.1.2007).

Euphemisms are often used by the Slovene media when describing homeless people ;
they may be referred to as 'boys and girls', or a 'tribe' (*Dnevnik,* 1.12.2007), words
which have positive connotations. However, in many of these positive descriptions it
is possible to detect hidden negative stereotypes – such as an assumption that they
all have drinking problems or specific personality problems. This 'positive' represen-
tation of the homeless could also imply that no additional measures are needed to
help them, as they are quite happy with this (chosen ?) lifestyle. For example in
Slovenske novice (13.8.2007), the commentary of the journalist was :

> " One gets a feeling that this life suits him (the homeless, ad. M. F. H.). But
> every coin has two sides, so at the same time his homeless life is not a bed
> of roses… "

Likewise, Meert *et al.* (2004, p.34) found in Denmark that " there is a tendency to
describe the roofless as sympathetic people, vagrants, people who have chosen
to sleep rough… "

How are interventions to help homeless people described ?

The positive description of the homeless life mentioned above is also linked to an
almost complete lack of any critical articles that call for additional measures to
help homeless people or that question existing policies and practices. The
opinions of homelessness experts are not usually represented in the articles. The
one exception is that of professionals working directly with homeless people,
whose views are sometimes reported when their specific programme is discussed.
Most often, existing measures such as shelters, outreach services, providing food
or clothes and enabling basic hygiene are simply described. These descriptions
are often very detailed, including the precise number of beds, showers, meals
given and even the floor area available for the whole shelter. Thus a lot of data is
offered, but these interventions are always positively portrayed and their suffi-
ciency is never called into questioned. These findings are similar to those for
Denmark, where it was also found that many media articles simply described
different interventions without questioning either the need for these services or
their quality (Meert *et al.,* 2004, p. 35). Linking this back to the conceptual

framework outlined above, this could be labelled as a discourse strategy to show 'us' (those different from the homeless; the housed people) as the positive actors doing their philanthropic duty for those in need[12].

Furthermore, these articles do not usually take account of the perspectives of the homeless people (or other groups) being helped; they are passive recipients of care. Thus the needs of homeless people, their wishes and their desires are not mentioned. This is similar to the findings of Meert *et al.* (2004) and Hodgetts *et al.* (2005) that homeless people 'feature little as actors' and are 'given one-dimensional roles'. Most often, the only statements presented are from the professionals that are working with them, meaning that these stories are very one-sided (this is particularly true for *Delo*; in *Dnevnik* and *Slovenske novice* statements from homeless people are more often given). If the users are portrayed in person and not only as an abstract group that is being helped, they are portrayed as very satisfied. An example is a statement such as: "My life is better now" by a homeless person living in a trailer; it had been reported in the article that before this he lived as a hermit. According to the journalist writing the piece, after being visited by a social worker, having his hair cut and getting a dustbin near the trailer, "his sad eyes turned brighter" (*Delo*, 30.1.2007, *Delo* 20.1.2007). Homeless people are therefore portrayed as the 'needy victim' (as labelled by Hodgetts *et al.,* 2005), of whom philanthropic organisations take care.

The goal of some of these interventions, as described in newspaper articles, is to re-integrate the homeless back into society (through mechanisms such as street newspapers, the international football competition, having picnics for the homeless) and to provide them with basic aid or help with their substance abuse and health problems; none appears to have the provision of housing as a goal[13]. As noted above, the 'Housing First' approach is absent, and the assumption seems to be that the acquisition of housing will follow naturally after these people get better integrated in society and resolve their substance abuse problems. There were only a few cases where the professionals describing existing programmes mentioned that some additional action was needed or that some groups have problems

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[12] The positive portrayal of 'us' against 'them', where the 'us' are perceived as 'a priority' positive actors was also emphasized in the Slovene media analysis by Razpotnik and Dekleva (2007).

[13] It seems that the EU emphasis on social inclusion in a broader sense has been accepted in Slovenia, as all the above actions describe the interventions as aiding inclusion of this vulnerable group. However, it is perhaps unusual that events such as picnics for the homeless, receive attention in the media without any questions being raised about the more long-term solutions for homelessness in addition to these smaller or short-term interventions for promoting their inclusion.

accessing help. An example of this would be the problems encountered by people with dual diagnosis (mental health problem and addiction problem) in gaining access to supported housing (*Delo*, 17.9.2007).

How are the causes of homelessness explained ?

Pathways into homelessness are rarely described; where this happens it is mostly confined to those articles which describe the life stories of homeless people. The reasons for homelessness which are identified are mostly individual[14] (violence at home, alcohol and drug abuse), while structural reasons (institutional and policy) are almost never mentioned. The common sentiment is that "destiny that has taken away the roof over their head" (*Slovenske novice*, 29.12.2007). In one case, the problem of state bureaucracy and the difficulty in obtaining official documents for permanent residence in Slovenia is described as one of the reasons for homelessness amongst 'the erased'; that is, the specific group of people who were living in Slovenia prior to independence but were deleted from the permanent residence register after it (*Dnevnik,* 6.1.2007).

This 'individualistic' approach to the causes of homelessness is perhaps not surprising and also exists in other countries (see for example Meert *et al*., 2004, Hodgetts *et al.,* 2005). However, more surprising and problematic is the 'individualistic' approach to solutions found in the Slovene press. The state and its policies are rarely mentioned in these articles, either as contributing to the reasons for homelessness or as a means for providing solutions. One article mentioned in only a very general way the withdrawal of the state in ensuring well-being in the society and its transfer to the sphere of civil society (*Dnevnik*, 4.8.2007). Another states that "the expectation that the state will solve our problems is ungrounded" and "individuals themselves have to be active in searching for solution" (*Dnevnik*, 16.4.2007). It seems then, that not only does the state fail to provide solutions for homeless people, it is not even expected to do so (individuals must find solutions themselves). However, this seems somewhat in tension with the media portrayal of passive homeless people as needy victims who need to be assisted by philanthropic organisations. Perhaps this tension could be interpreted as: homeless people should be helped, but only with their basic needs; their long-term housing solutions are their own concern.

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[14] For example in the *Delo* article (20.12.2007), the life story of Tone is presented; in the words of the journalist he is 'not a typical clochard'. He lives in a trailer, which is called 'his palace'. He said that he lost everything after his divorce and then he started drinking. Then he stopped and now according to his own words is 'satisfied with his life'.

Summary

Thus, in general, Slovenian newspapers do not seem to represent a negative picture of the homeless. They are not seen as dangerous, but more often as victims of violence and of life events that lead to homelessness. Such a depiction of homeless people as needy victims can build public awareness, but it also brings negative consequences in that it puts the homeless at the mercy of fashionable interests and seasonal patterns of care, such as media emphasis on the issue only during winter time (Hodgett *et al*., 2005). The homeless are rarely given an active role or a voice in media articles; when they are it is mostly to express satisfaction with the available services, or to present their life stories for public consumption. The state is not presented as an important actor and is almost entirely absent from newspaper articles on this issue, which corresponds with the absence of homeless people as a specific group within national housing policies.

Conclusion

The homeless are a specific group, a 'tribe' that has been deprived by destiny of a roof over their heads. They are a 'picturesque' part of the city and are usually satisfied with their lives and the help that they get. This is the broad portrait of the homeless that one gets from Slovenian newspapers. In addition, the articles reviewed described in detail the various interventions that aid the homeless, which gives the reader a feeling that a lot is being done, while the homeless are usually very happy with what they receive and are therefore contented service users.

In addition, the journals employ the same narrow definition of homelessness that can be found in Government policy documents. This is well illustrated by the article that contrasted the status of the family that had been evicted with that of 'the homeless' with whom they were sleeping rough. Homelessness in the Slovene media is therefore sometimes even more narrowly defined than 'rough sleeping'; it refers to those rough sleepers who have adopted this 'lifestyle'.

What is especially evident in the analysed articles, is the sense that the existing measures are sufficient and that no other, more comprehensive strategy is required to tackle homelessness. Thus, even though many of the categories of article identified seem quite similar to those found elsewhere (see Meert *et al.,* 2004), the more critical note that can be found in newspapers in other countries seems to be missing in Slovenia. This is important because such critical commentary might help to stimulate public debate on the sufficiency of existing measures and/or challenge the existing perception of the homeless.

Thus, the key conclusion of this analysis is that media representations of homeless people in Slovenia are not negative, so the view is not a destructive one. However it is also not a 'helpful' view, as it does not motivate change and progress. The policies and actions of the state are, according to their media portrayal, satisfactory and sufficient. The 'convincing narrative' that is, according to Jacobs *et al,* (2003), necessary for housing problems to be recognised and acted upon is, in this respect, missing. The homeless are not really portrayed as a problem – which of course has its positive side as it means that homeless people are not criminalised or in other ways negatively portrayed. However, it also means that no call for additional measures is generated by the media, which is problematic because this is one of the critical actors that could motivate political change. One way forward might be for NGOs to take a more active role, with clearly targeted media/press strategies to shift the focus of media attention in a constructive direction.

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