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PROFILES AND TRENDS IN DANISH HOMELESSNESS

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Profiles and trends in Danish homelessness

Definitions, measurement and interpretations

Abstract

Due to an increased visibility in homelessness from the late 80s and onwards many political initiatives have been taken to reduce homelessness and to improve the situation for the homeless. The aim of this article is to try to describe the development in homelessness in Denmark since the late 80s and on the basis of this to discuss whether the initiatives seem to have had an impact. Due to inconsistent definitions and dissimilar data sources it is, however, not possible to give a precise description of the development. The figures do not seem to support a general assumption that there has been an increase in homelessness. The composition of the group has changed, as the proportion of young and elderly seems to have decreased and the proportion of the middle-aged to have increased. There is probably an increase in the proportion of ethnic minorities, whereas a change in the gender composition is difficult to verify or falsify.

Introduction

Since the 80s, homelessness has obtained an increasing attention from politicians, media and researchers. Homelessness is a vague and ever changing concept and therefore it has been seen as an indicator of and also the result of all kinds of changing structures in society – and even in the world – e.g. globalisation, the demographic revolution, the feminisation of poverty, individualization, the dismantling of the welfare state, etc. – statements that are not suited for falsification. Our aim is much more modest, namely to describe the socio-political initiatives towards homelessness and the development in homelessness in Denmark since the late 80s and onwards, based on which we will discuss whether the initiatives seem to have had any effect.

1. Trends in policies to combat homelessness 1988-2004

In the end of the 80s, the homeless were included among the socially vulnerable groups, which thus made them appear on both the research and the political agenda. Part of the explanation of the focus was, however, that the socially vulnerable people all of a sudden became quite visible in major cities as well as at the social housing estates. The general welfare-policy towards these groups seemed to have failed and, therefore, new targeted efforts were needed.

Many of these initiatives were, however, not targeted exclusively at the homeless, which have more or less implicitly been part of the target-groups of the mentally ill and addicts (cf. e.g. Ebsen, 2002; Socialministeriet, 2002) and thus the efforts were also supposed to influence the phenomenon of homelessness and homeless people. In the following we will list the major and most important initiated socio-political efforts that may have improved the housing situation for these groups.

In the *end of the 80s*, the Ministry of Social Affairs among other things initiated an experimental strategy. The first comprehensive experimental programme SUM¹ – was launched in 1988. The programme aimed at improving the life-situation for socially excluded and vulnerable people – including the homeless – through local projects. The evaluation of the programme concluded that the projects did not reach the most vulnerable persons – especially not the homeless – partly because the programmes were not sufficiently targeted (Just Jeppesen et al., 1992; Kjær Jensen, 1992). Consequently, the following programmes became more focused on differentiated target groups and types of projects.

In the *beginning of the 90s*, there was much concern about the consequences of the deinstitutionalization, which caused the closing down of many beds in the psychiatric hospital sector – especially in the last part of the 80s. This implied a reduction in the number of long-term mental patients from 4,200 in 1986 to 865 in 1994 (Ebsen, 2002). In order to counteract these consequences “The 15M–pool” (1991-) was initiated with the intention of improving the conditions of the non-hospitalized mentally ill people through a variety of measures (supported housing, day shelters, etc.) and support and contact persons. These efforts were continued through subsequent programmes throughout the 90s, through encouraging municipalities to establish permanent as well as temporary supported housing projects to enable the mentally ill to stay in their own residence.

“Storby-puljen“ (The Urban–Pool) (1992-2000) was targeted at socially exposed individuals with mental problems and problems with abuse. The pool should enable the municipalities and counties to develop permanent supported housing and open drop–in and caring centres, to support the schemes with contact and support persons and outreach work, and to secure that the voluntary social organizations and the user organizations were involved in the efforts (Jensen et al., 1997). The evaluation of these efforts was positive and emphasized the need for continued diversified efforts.

More general strategies were also initiated through *agreements between the Government and the counties and municipalities* in order to expand the services for mentally ill non-hospitalized patients. Ebsen sums up the public efforts from 1991 to 2001 concerning the mentally ill, and points to the fact that the most remarkable development was within the district-psychiatry, especially the inclusion of the support and contact person scheme in The Law on Social Service in 1998. He states that “...*primarily it is the mentally ill with their own residence who have benefited from the many funds and the policy that was formulated in the 90s*” (Ebsen, 2002:12). He shows that the continuing decrease in the number of beds in the hospital sector from 1993-2000 has been more or less compensated for by the increase of new supported housing (about 400), and that the latest agreement between the central government and the local authorities, 2000-2002, seems to influence the whole picture positively. (Ebsen, 2002: 12). We can add that

¹ SUM is an abbreviation for “Socialministeriets UdviklingsMidler” which in English is: “The development resources of the Ministry of Social Affairs”.

the status-report from 2002 shows that the agreement has resulted in about 600 new residences and about 450 new services of support in your own home for the mentally ill (Socialministeriet & Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2002: 40).

A special initiative was taken in 1999 with the project “Skæve huse til skæve eksistenser” (*Freak Houses for Freak People*). A conspicuous initiative that has aimed at providing low cost permanent housing for people who have not been able to obtain a residence or who would not be able to stay in an ordinary residence even with special support. The residents are people formerly living at institutions for homeless or living on the street. 280 residences in 32 housing-units have been established, and 100 additional residences are planned (Socialministeriet, 2004).

In the year 2000, the “*The Action-plan for Homeless*” was launched. The initiatives in the plan focused on the same remedies as mentioned above: drop in centres, night shelters, and special emergency sections. The new thing was the alternative residential homes for older abusers, social support for homeless under discharge from institutions as well as targeted initiatives towards younger homeless and homeless prostitutes (Socialministeriet & By- og Boligministeriet, 2000). In 2002, the initiatives from “The Action-plan for homeless” were entered in the new action plan – “*Our common Responsibility*”.

To summarize, many initiatives have been taken since the late 80s, when the problem became conspicuous. First, the initiatives focused on the mentally ill, who were said to contribute much to homelessness. Later on the initiatives also focused on the homeless as such. Most of the initiatives have taken the shape of specific programmes, whereas some initiatives have become part of the legislation as the support and contact person scheme as well as supported housing.

The importance of the overall structures and general welfare policies should, however, not be forgotten. One should mention the recession in the late 80s followed by an upswing in the 90s. The recession resulted in high unemployment among young people, and to counteract this different activation schemes were introduced throughout the 90s.

2. Conceptual and operational definitions of homelessness in Denmark and the EU

2.1. Denmark

There are many reasons for wishing to *estimate* the number of homeless individuals. Policy initiatives to prevent further homelessness and reduce the existing homelessness will be more accurate and effective based on precise information and figures. If you want to reduce the duration of homelessness, knowledge is needed, too. Precise information about repeated homelessness for the same individuals could help improve the effort to deliver sustainable permanent accommodation.

Many Danish researchers have had trouble in defining homelessness because this is a prerequisite for describing the phenomenon and also for reporting about trends in nature and extent of homelessness.

In 1992, Preben Brandt ventured the following definition, which has since then been rather influential both within the research area and within the legislative area, though it has also been met with criticism.

"An individual is homeless if he or she has not got a home that can be regarded as stable or permanent, and which meets his or her demands for a reasonable standard of dwelling. He or she is furthermore incapable of using the various relations and institutions offered by society – e.g. family network and private and public institutions of any kind. The reason for this may be some open or hidden conditions inherent within the individuals themselves or in the societal structure". (Brandt, 1992:158) (our translation)

Later on Brandt elaborates on this description making it more process-oriented and also less individualistic:

"That is how the homeless are. They are people who are "wrong" in relation to what we others consider to be "right"; they behave differently. They do not live in a way that we find right, and cannot utilise society's institutions in the term's broadest sense. From the point of view of ordinary citizens the homeless are different in a negative sense, and we exclude them from our ordinary social life. We do not like them." (Brandt, 1999, p.511)

Stax (2001) points to the inherent problems of the endeavour to define and quantify homelessness at all, seeing two dimensions in the general and imprecise understanding of the word. One dimension relates to the question of "homelessness as a place" (where do people actually *stay*) – constructed alongside a continuum. The other dimension has to do with "homelessness as types of people", where different ideal types are considered to fall under the concept of homelessness (street children, the traditional homeless individual, the mental patients and the drug addicts), whereas users of shelters for battered women are not included in the usual perception of the phenomenon in Denmark.² He emphasizes that the definition is not only academic: the choice of definition might very well influence the policies for these groups.

Bech Jørgensen (1999) also questions the possibility for defining homelessness. She claims that *normality*, which we seem to take for granted, should be defined. If we do not have an idea of what normality is we will not be able to know what is outside normality.

Efforts to define subgroups or related groups: street children and bag people can be found in Juul (1992) and in Caswell & Schultz (2001). Caswell & Schultz (2001) criticise the Danish research tradition where the nominal definitions of homelessness have been broad, but where the operational definitions have often been centred round the users of services, leaving out the non-users, e.g. the bag people. The definitions of Juul and Caswell & Schultz are based on fieldwork and are of a phenomenological character.

"Street children are children and young people under the age of 18 who for a shorter or longer period of time spend their lives in special street environments such as Christiania, around the Central Station, in buildings occupied by squatters, in shopping centres and in other more temporary places in the city. They include young people who are rootless and who are primarily attached to groups belonging to the street environment. Nominally they may have an address at their parents' or at an institution, but the crucial difference is that they actually spend little time there and that there are no adults – i.e. parents, schools, institutions and social welfare authorities – with whom they have a binding relation". (Juul, 1991, p. 53 (Our translation))

² These points will be discussed below.

"Bag people are elderly mentally ill individuals living on the street, isolated from human contact, without any relation to the social system or the health system and without any considerable abuse (own translation). (Caswell & Schultz, 2001, p. 17 (our translation))

Järvinen's summing up the Nordic research of homelessness seems still to have some validity. She emphasizes that there are three ways of defining homelessness in the Scandinavian research if any definitions at all. First, some definitions take as their point of departure the individuals who stay at *institutions* for homeless people. Järvinen points, however, out that the problem about this definition is that it is the number of places rather than the number of homeless individuals that are counted. And furthermore, some users of homeless institutions do have a dwelling. A *standard of living* concept, e.g. a poverty rate (cf. Hansen et al., 1987) or a minimum housing standard concept (e.g. living in a hostel or a bad apartment) constitutes the second kind of definition. Järvinen criticizes that kind of definition as including a normative understanding about what constitutes a home. Third, the concept of homelessness has been used to describe *deviant ways of lifestyle* marking different groups who live outside or at the margin of society. Järvinen criticizes these kinds of definitions as normative but they do also make it difficult to make an estimate of the exact number of homeless people (Järvinen, 1992).

In Denmark, we do not have legislation for homeless people and the closest we can get to an official definition is found in the *legislation on accommodations* (boformer) in section 94 in Law on Social Services. The users of these accommodations, "boformer", are characterised as follows:

"...individuals with special social problems, who are without or who are unable to live in their own apartment, and who are in need of a place to stay and in need of measures for activating support, care and subsequent assistance." (Law on Social Service, § 94 (our translation))

Section 94 of the Law on Social Service is almost identical with the latest revision of the former section 105 of the Social Assistance Act. In 1998, Law on Social Service replaced the Social Assistance Act.³ It should, however, be noticed that it is possible legally to be enrolled in a section 94-accommodation (boform) while having a permanent residence at the same time. It is also noteworthy that in a Danish context homelessness is not basically perceived of as a housing problem but rather as a behavioural problem: it is not having a home and not having a network that in Brandt's definition and that of the legislation and the general public (Christensen & Koch-Nielsen, 2004) constitute the picture of the homeless people. Individuals who are "only" having a housing problem are not considered as "homeless" but as "houseless" people. We agree with Stax, who points out that "special social problems" is a vague expression that does not make it quite clear who is included and who is excluded from the homeless population.

Even though, in the following the definition from Law on Social Service will be our point of departure for the discussion. We do though bear in mind that the definition is very imprecise and we know that we are restricted only to discuss and analyze trends regarding the users of special institutions designated for people with special social problems. Thus we exclude the individuals

³ See Stax, 2004, for a discussion of the development in the legal understanding of the concept of homelessness in Denmark since 1974. Among other things Stax points out that the concept "homeless" was originally used in section 105 of the Social Assistance Act until 1994 when it was replaced by the more vague terms of people with social difficulties, people without a dwelling, and people with a dwelling but unable to live there.

who might have the same social problems, but who on the other hand live in hidden homelessness or in their own residence not being enrolled in a section 94-accommodation (boform). We will thus include the number of section 94-accommodation (boform) *users*.

2.b. FEANTSA

In recent years, the research-network of FEANTSA has been working on formulating a conceptual and operational definition of homelessness which among other things should make it possible to accomplish cross-national comparisons about the extent of homelessness as well as identifying gaps in recent research. This is done – of course – in order to make it easier to reduce and combat homelessness.

According to FEANTSA, the policy objectives related to homelessness requires that the definition and operationalization of homelessness is able to make existing – and hereby also hidden – homelessness visible. The intention is that homelessness is not only related to rough sleeping or the use of institutions established and arranged for homeless people but also includes people who live in insecure housing and are forced to move between different insecure housing situations (Edgar et al., 2004).

The point of departure of the FEANTSA conceptualization is an interpretation of the word *home* stressing that in order to have a home, three conditions should be fulfilled:

“Having a home may be understood to include:

- *having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his or her family can exercise exclusive possession*
- *being able to maintain privacy and enjoy social relations*
- *having legal title to occupy”* (Edgar et al., 2004: 4)

An individual is homeless if he or she has to share space involuntarily, or if he or she does not have space to enjoy personal privacy and social relations, or if he or she does not possess a legal tenancy agreement specifying the property to be let, the period of tenancy and a right of exclusive possession.

Following this line of thought Edgar et al. identifies five different conceptual categories which neither meet the physical, the social nor the legal premises.

Table 1: The domains of homelessness.

Conceptual category	Physical domain	Social domain	Legal domain
Rooflessness	No dwelling (roof)	No private space for social relations	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession
Houseless	Has a place to live	No private space for social relations	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession
Insecure and inadequate housing	Has a place to live (not secure and unfit for habitation)	Has space for social relations	No security of tenure

Insecure housing (adequate housing)	Has a place to live	Has space for social relations	No security of tenure
Inadequate housing (secure tenure)	Inadequate dwelling (dwelling unfit for habitation)	Has space for social relations	Has legal title and/or security of tenure

Source: Edgar et al., 2004, p. 6.

Based on this conceptual definition Edgar et al. design an operational definition that infers 16 categories of living situations which constitute an interpretation of homelessness and should at least in principle be measurable (see Edgar et al., 2004 for further details about the 16 categories).

3. Studies of the number of different homeless populations in Denmark

First, it should be stated that in Denmark we cannot boast of having information about the entire homeless population (whatever that might be).

Several times, Brandt has, however, tried to estimate the number of "homeless" people. In 1995, he estimated the number *in Copenhagen* based on his own walking the streets at night and based on his knowledge of the users from the biggest institution in Copenhagen, Sundholm. His estimation included rough sleepers (450), users of section 105 institutions (1,000), those temporarily using other institutions (e.g. prison, hospital, etc. (150), and those dwelling erratically (2000), which sums up to approx. 3,500 individuals (National Report for Feantsa, 1995).

Before the establishment of the statistical base mentioned below, reports dealing with social exclusion, new poverty, etc. tried to give some kind of estimation of numbers and trends based on annual reports from different services, personal communications from people working in the field, etc. In his report on the Socially Excluded, Fridberg (1992) makes an estimation of the annual number of users of section 105 institutions based on a survey made by the Association of County Councils in 1988 (the counties are responsible for accommodations for the "homeless") and the annual reports from some of those institutions. His estimation was that "*At a national level one might with some uncertainty estimate that between 12,000 and 13,000 individuals have stayed at a 105-institution in one year*". (Fridberg, 1992:45) It should be noted that this estimation is limited to a precise group of people, namely the users of a specific group of institutions (usually supposed to shelter the "homeless"), but it does not try to say anything about "homelessness" as such. Earlier, this other estimations were twice as high (Hansen et al., 1987, who works with a concept of "absolute poverty"). Based on the combination of statistics from different groups: psychiatric patients, inmates, and users of homeless institutions, Fridberg concludes that "...there appears to be a considerable overlap between users of the separate systems" (Fridberg, 1992: 12).

In 1993, Eskelinen et al. (1994)⁴ tried to count the number not of the homeless but of the "socially excluded" in the City of Copenhagen. The socially excluded were defined as people:

- Who have experienced a process of exclusion in terms of labour market, family, friend, colleagues, etc.
- Who need help from others because of massive personal/individual problems
- Who have an unmet need for help in order to be able to be integrated in society

⁴ See also The Danish National Report for Feantsa from 1995.

Furthermore, they set up a category of individuals on their way to social exclusion who are isolated and socially threatened.

The aim of the study was to estimate the proportion of those kinds of people in institutions and services. The study was carried out through a one-day census where both private and public institutions and street-level social workers were asked to categorize the users of the different services. Based on this registration, they estimated the number of socially excluded on the day of the census to be 5,600 individuals. It turned out that homelessness was only seen as the main cause for social exclusion for approx. 1/4 of those categorised as “socially excluded”, which should give a number of approx. 1,400. The difference between this figure and that of Mr. Brandt (mentioned above) gives a clear picture of how difficult these estimations actually are.

The report about Street children (Juil & Ertmann, 1991) also tried to estimate the number of street children in Copenhagen to 300. The report was based on interviews with practitioners, with some children contacted through social projects, and with other children via "the snowball-method". This method is, however, not a valid method to use, which the authors themselves are very well aware of: there is a big variation in terms of the different estimations from different actors in the field and, furthermore, they are dealing with a very fluctuating group. Recently, the number of bag people was estimated – also with caution – to 150 at a national level (Caswell & Schultz, 2001).

It was not until 1999 that all the counties became obliged to report to The Social Appeal Board the information concerning the users of the section 94 accommodations (boformer) based on the users' civil reg. no. Since then, The Social Appeal Board has published four annual reports covering the years from 2000 to 2003.

Thanks to the civil reg. no. system and this new central registration, it has now become possible to give a number for *the annual flow of users that surmounts to approx. 8,000 in the year 2002*. The number of women annually seeking shelter in other institutions – the refuges – because of domestic violence should be added. The users of the refuges are not registered by their civil reg. no. Only the number of entrances are being registered which amount to approx. 2,000 annually. The 8,000 users of shelters and hostels correspond to approx. 17,000 entrances. If we dare to infer the same correlation between stock and flow in the crises centres we can estimate that the 2,000 entrances is equal close to 950 women, which gives us a total of 8-9,000 users. But other kinds of accommodations might also be included. Thus a special programme “Freak houses for freak people” is targeted at people not able to live in ordinary housing even with social support (functional homeless) or people who have been staying for a long time in an ordinary institution, and those coming from the streets. These accommodations are, however, thought of as permanent. On the other hand, the access is not free or following an ordinary waiting list. The approx. 250 tenants here might be included or excluded from the homelessness figures.

4. Trends

In the late 80s and early 90s, “The New Homelessness” came on the agenda as was the case in other countries. The rhetoric at that time – mainly based on experience and field reports – was that a new kind of homelessness was emerging, i.e. the young, women, the psychiatric patients, and the immigrants. They were now taking up room at the institutions whereas the number of the old-fashioned type, i.e. the elderly alcoholic men, was decreasing.

In 1993, Järvinen published a report on the new homeless people. Based on a historical analysis of institutional reports and on a scrutinised reading of research reports, she questions the two assumptions about the increase in numbers and about the change in the structure of homelessness. It depends on with which period we compare the present time, and also which institutions are in focus. Legislative changes that influence, which groups of institutions considered being for the “Homeless” and which are not, must be taken into consideration. “Homelessness is – and this can well be repeated – a social construction of which the content and structure depend upon the institutions that society has chosen to define as homelessness institutions”. Some of the other popular statements can simply not be verified – on the contrary they seem to be falsified by statistics – as the assumption that the homeless are getting younger and that the psychiatric patients are a new user group. Järvinen summarizes her critical reading. “Whether the proportion of homeless with psychic problems in reality has increased has not been answered satisfactorily through the research reports. What is certain is that the mentally ill, like the young homeless, have been incorporated in the new homelessness rhetoric.”⁵ (Järvinen, 1993:56) (our translation)

In this section of the article we will discuss possible trends – and the possibility of discussing trends at all – regarding:

- The extent of homelessness in the Danish population
- The age and gender of the Danish homeless population
- The “strangeness”/ethnicity of the Danish homeless population

First, we would like to present the primary sources, which our discussions and analyses are based on.

4.1. Data-sources

At present three different sources picturing the users of hostels, shelters, and refuges are available. These sources contain different types of information and are collected in different ways. Our two primary sources are an annual report published by the Social Appeal Board and an annual statistical update by Statistics Denmark. Finally, we also use the annual report published by the Organization of Refuges in Denmark about refuges in Denmark.

The Social Appeal Board report was at the beginning met with some difficulties due to the fact that some of the institutions are small and without sufficient administrative resources and experience of data processing, but the quality is said to be constantly improving. The statistics cover county services and municipal services based on an agreement with the county. The statistics also cover those private services that are based on an agreement and where part of the expenses will be reimbursed (partly) by the state. Only 24-hour services are included, e.g. those offering more than just an emergency stay and more than only a day shelter.

The users are registered by their civil reg. nos., which means that the reports from The Social Appeal Board do not have any problems in terms of double-counting. The report – which was published in 2002, 2003, and in 2004 contains information about the number of services, the number of places, the number of users of each service, their sex as well as data about length and type of stay, source of income, nationality, etc.

⁵ For a critical discussion of Järvinen, 1993, see Nordentoft, 1994.

In order to discuss the data from the Social Appeal Board a statistical update⁶ published by Statistics Denmark is relevant. Here the problem is that users are not registered by their civil reg. nos., which means that there might be some double-counting. Another difference between the data from Statistics Denmark and the Social Appeal Board is that the statistical update describes the users during one week every year; in comparison the report published by the Social Appeal Board concerns a whole calendar year. Finally, the statistical updates only contain information about the type of service, the number of 24-hour places, day-places, staff, and age of the users, the proportion of female 24-hour users, and the number of day-users each day. An advantage compared to the reports from the Social Appeal Board is that the statistical update has been published annually for more than twenty years, which make it possible to discuss and analyse trends and developments for a longer period. The statistical update is based on the services reporting annually to Statistics Denmark.

Finally, the Organization of Refuges in Denmark⁷ has since 1997 published an annual report about refuges in Denmark. The Research and Information Centre in Esbjerg draw up these reports. In the reports you find information about organisational issues, capacity, numbers of stays and the length of stays, user-involvement as well as more specific information about the users: age, nationality source of income, number of children, the character of the violence – and finally aftercare and moving. As you can decide voluntarily whether or not you want to use your civil reg. no. when enrolling in a refuge these reports do not distinguish between the users, and some double-checking seems to be unavoidable. The reports from the Organization of Refuges in Denmark only play a minor part in the article but they have been valuable for discussions and putting into perspective when we have met insoluble problems found in our two other primary sources. The reports are based on questionnaires accomplished at each enrolment by the employees at the refuges as well as an annual questionnaire about organisational issues – both are collected by The Research and Information Centre.

No peaceful harmony is found between the data presented in our three sources. In the following, whenever we meet difficulties we will discuss different possible explanations trying to solve the problems that occur. It should especially be mentioned that there are certain problems related to which services are included in the different statistical sources, though at the surface they seem to include the same thing.

4.2. Increasing homelessness?

Following the presentation of different ways of defining and measuring homelessness it is not difficult to understand that measuring trends might be almost impossible and should be done with great care. The optimal situation, of course, is when it is possible to use the same operational definition over a period of time. This is, however, very seldom the case. Again it must be stressed that the measurements only depend on institutional figures and therefore might just be a counting of the size of the services more than of the demand for services.

In the following, we will present the data and statistics published by Statistics Denmark and The Social Appeal Board. First, let us have a look at the number of institutions, beds, and users since 1987 according to Statistics Denmark.

⁶ In Danish: Den Sociale Ressourceopgørelse.

⁷ The Danish abbreviation is LOKK (Landsorganisation af Kvindekrisecentre i Danmark). Homepage: <http://www.lokk.dk/>. (English section under construction.)

Table 2: Number of users during one week, number of institutions and number of beds distributed according to year.

	Institutions	Beds	Users, one week		
			24-hour users	Day-users	Total
1987	65	2,577	2,510	367	2,877
1992	76	2,588	2,425	522	2,947
1993	74	2,549	2,503	489	2,992
1994	76	2,470	2,337	454	2,791
1995	78	2,435	2,218	552	2,770
1996	80	2,330	2,138	718	2,856
1997	83	2,323	2,332	952	3,284
1998	86	2,377	2,412	849	3,261
1999	82	2,444	2,437	891	3,328
2000	84	2,377	2,463	866	3,329
2001	85	2,398	2,311	1,345	3,656
2002	87	2,337	2,223	1,236	3,459

Source: Munk et al., 2000; Børner, 1997; Statistics Denmark, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 & 2003.

Both the number of 24-hour users and day-users might include double counting and some individuals might be included in both categories if for example they have shifted from day-user to 24-hour user during the week of counting or vice versa.

Anyway, we see that the number of weekly 24-hour users have fluctuated more or less around the same number since 1987 up to 2002, but also that the number of day-users has increased significantly. This last thing is mostly explained by the inclusion of Koefoeds Skole in the data from Statistics Denmark.⁸

We also see an increase in the number of institutions. In this light, it is remarkable that there has been a more or less stable level in the number of beds during the last fifteen years – actually – a slight decrease followed by a small decrease in the numbers of 24-hour users, too. The fluctuations in the number of beds are explained by a reorganization of the different institutions over the years and because some institutions have been shut down and others have been established.

As emphasized before, the data from Statistics Denmark do not give us any idea of the total number of users during a whole year and double counting might be included. These two problems – on the other hand – seem to be dealt with when using the data from The Social Appeal Board. These data might give a quite precise idea about the total number of *users* during a whole year. We have presented the data available from The Social Appeal Board in the following table. The Social Appeal Board includes information about the number of 24-hour-, day- and night-places but when summing up the total number of users yearly they do not differentiate between the different types of users. In the following we will therefore discuss the total number of users and not differentiate between different types.⁹

Table 3: Institutions, beds, places and users, distributed according to year.

	Institutions	Beds	Places, day	Places, night	Users, whole year
2000	66	2,200	654	34	7,365

⁸ The service “Koefoeds skole” in Copenhagen was included for the first time in 2001 and has about 650 day users.

⁹ In 2002, 78 percent of all enrolments are done by 24-hour users, 4 percent are accomplished by day-users, and 18 percent by night-users.

2001	67	2,136	684	34	8,314
2002	67	2,222	689	33	7,974
2003	67	2,014	606	39	7,169

Source: Den Sociale Ankestyrelse, 2002a, 2002b, 2003 & 2004.

Note: Due to technical problems no data is included about the users in 2003 from one county with a capacity of 92 beds and 8 day-places. This seems to explain most of the decrease in the number of users found between 2002 and 2003.

In general, you can conclude that the number of users registered by the Social Appeal Board has been stable during the four years of registration. There seems to have been an increase since 2000 but this probably has been influenced by the low quality of data in the beginning of the time of registration. It is remarkable how constantly the number of users follow the number of beds. A factor a little bit less than 4 explains the relationship between the number of beds and the number of users during a whole year.¹⁰

A few comments are necessary to explain the difference in the number of institutions between the data from The Social Appeal Board and the data from Statistics Denmark before drawing any general conclusion about the development in the number of users of institutions for homeless people.

Totally 87 services are included in the material from the Statistics Denmark in 2002 and 67 services in the registration from the Social Appeal Board. In the material from the Social Appeal Board no distinction is drawn between refuges and shelters/hostels. Instead a few services included not only function as municipal accommodations (boformer) under section 94 in The Social Service Act but also as refuges and:

“...for these services all registered users are included in the statistics because it has not been possible to distinguish users of the function for battered women from other users”. (Den Sociale Ankestyrelse, 2003, p. 10. Our translation)

In other words, some refuges are included in the material from the Social Appeal Board even though the statistics do not intend to cover refuges as such. In the reports published by Statistics Denmark it is not possible to see the name of the different institutions/accommodations (boformer) included. To make a kind of comparison we therefore contacted Statistics Denmark to gather information about the different services. This information we compared with the data from the Social Appeal Board trying to figure out possible deviations.

The comparison shows that 20 refuges figuring in the data from Statistics Denmark are not included at all by the Social Appeal Board. In terms of hostels, a total of 10 services are included both in Statistics Denmark and in the Social Appeal Board, even though one service is included in Statistics Denmark but missing in The Social Appeal Board, and vice versa.¹¹ Regarding protected boarding houses, the Social Appeal Board includes two that are not included by Statistics Denmark.¹² As to reception centres, four services are included by Statistics Denmark but not by the Social Appeal Board.¹³ Concerning day-shelters, one is excluded by the Social Appeal Board but included by

¹⁰ Concerning Kofoeds Skole only the 50 beds are included. This means that the 650 day-users are excluded from the data published by The Social Appeal Board, but included by Statistics Denmark.

¹¹ “13’rens Botilbud” in Nørresundby is included by Statistics Denmark but excluded by the Social Appeal Board. Lærkehøj (Frederiksberg) is included by the Social Appeal Board, but not by Statistics Denmark.

¹² “Havnen” in Haderslev & “Lænkepensionatet” in Glostrup.

¹³ That is “Clementshus” (Aalborg), “Flydedokken” (Fredericia), “Midtbyen” (Århus), and “Åbo” (Randers).

Statistics Denmark.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Social Appeal Board includes two halfway houses which are not represented in Statistics Denmark. Finally, no divergences are appearing regarding community homes.¹⁵

These findings partly explain the divergences in the number of institutions and the number of beds between the two sources and this might influence the number of homeless individuals registered. You might especially expect deviation between Statistics Denmark and the Social Appeal Board in the proportion of female users because 20 refuges are covered by Statistics Denmark but left out by the Social Appeal Board (see below).

We must conclude that choosing between our two sources does not give us any precise picture about the development in the number of 24-hour users of homeless people in Denmark during the last 15 years, as not all institutions are included in one source.¹⁶ We see an almost stable development in the figures published by both our sources. Data from the Social Appeal Board are different from data from Statistics Denmark because double counting are excluded and we, therefore, have the possibility of considering the development in the total number of users even on a yearly basis. Assuming that the number of places multiplied by a factor 4 can be used as an indication of the total number of users it seems reasonable to expect that the yearly number of users has been more or less stable during the last 15 years.

If we should dare a very cautious estimation it would be that 8,500-10,500 different individuals – all three kinds of users included – for the past 15 years have been enrolled annually in the institutions represented in our sources.¹⁷

4.3. Youth homelessness?

Youth homelessness as a specific phenomenon has never really been on the Danish agenda, whereas street-children was a hot topic in the late 80s (Børner, 1998), as was also reflected in the research overview at the beginning of this article. The age – and especially the changes in the age of the homeless population – nevertheless causes special attention. First, because a changing age structure is perceived as an indicator of some more fundamental changes. Related to increasing youth homelessness, which was very high up on the European political agenda in the 90s, changes in family structure and high youth unemployment was seen as a cause for homelessness (Avramov, 1999). Second, the tools suggested for re-integration and prevention change if we talk about homeless youngsters compared to for example homeless elderly people. The services established for the homeless meet different demands from people at different stages in their life. Many examples can be found pointing to special groups of homeless in the Danish papers:

“Already 10 years ago the politicians and the professionals working in the field saw that the number of young homeless was increasing. But no big initiatives were implemented. More and more youngsters suffer from difficulties regarding their integration into society. They have turned out to be the exposed youngsters.” (Introduction to an article in Jyllandsposten, May 24, 2001 (our translation).

¹⁴ That is ”Værestedet 13´ren” (Aalborg).

¹⁵ That is “Tre Ege, ekstern bolig” (Århus) and “Terrasen” (Frederiksberg).

¹⁶ When discussing female homelessness below, it will furthermore appear that not all refuges are included in neither of the statistics meaning that some refuges are only represented in LOKK, for example 17 are only in LOKK 2003.

¹⁷ The suggestion includes about 350 adult users from the services that are included in the 17 services only represented in LOKK 2003. These 17 services have about 90 24-hour places.

In the following we will try to illustrate the trend in the age-composition of the users in the period from 1989 to 2002.¹⁸

The following discussion will be based on the same sources that were used above when discussing the number of service users. We, therefore, meet some problems of comparison, which we have taken into account by setting up two assumptions:

- 1) The distribution of age is the same among all types of users.
- 2) The proportion of the different groups of users is stable during one year. This makes it possible to compare the data from Statistics Denmark with the data from the Social Appeal Board.

Together the two assumptions make it somehow possible to compare the developments in the different groups keeping in mind that the assumptions can be neither verified nor refuted by help of the data at our disposal.

Table 4: Distribution of age of the 24-hour users of section 105 institutions one week in 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, and 2002 according to Statistics Denmark and in 2002 according to the Social Appeal Board (all types of users).

	1989	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2000	2002	2002*
	Percent.	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Under 20	13	5	7	6	2	5	2	2	2
20-39	42	47	48	45	48	47	50	47	45
40-59	35	38	36	41	42	43	43	45	47
60 or more	10	10	9	8	8	5	6	6	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	101	100	99

Source: Børner, 1997, Statistics Denmark (1998, 1999, 2001, 2003) and the Social Appeal Board, 2003 (all types of users).

* The Social Appeal Board bases their statistics on the age of the users at their first enrolment.

Table 5 shows that the proportion of users below the age of 20 continued to decrease until 1997 followed by a minor increase in 1999 and then decreasing to the former level of 2 percent of all users. It seems as if youth homelessness has been a minor problem since the beginning of the 90s. The *proportion* of individuals between the age of 20 and 39 has been more or less stable during all the years increasing to about 45-50 percent. Regarding individuals between the age of 40 and 59, we see a minor increase in the middle of the 90s and then a stabilisation around a little less than half of the users. Concerning persons above the age of 60, we see a decline and a stabilisation at 5 percent of all users since 1999.

An overall conclusion is that we see fewer individuals belonging to the outer zones of our age categories – that is less elderly and less very young among the users. So when it is reported that more and more young people stay at the accommodations (boformer)/institutions for homeless it depends on what “young” actually means.

2.3. Feminisation of homelessness?

¹⁸ A discussion of trends in the development between 1981 and 1995 can be seen in Børner, 1997. We have chosen 1989 as our starting point following the general outlook of the article.

The interest in female homelessness has reached us from the Anglo-American concept of feminisation of poverty. Järvinen (1992) has argued against the influence of this trend in Nordic research pointing to the differences in the welfare systems. She has also shown that a so-called increase in the proportion of women in hostels depended on the fact that refuges for victims of domestic violence due to a change in the legislation were placed in the same category (section 105) as shelters and hostels.

The Anglo-American perspective is well represented in the following quotation from the report: *Women and Homelessness in Europe*” (Edgar et al., 2001).

“If there is a single message to be identified in this book it is, we suggest (notwithstanding variations between countries) that increases in the exposure of women to homelessness are at base related to the “feminisation of poverty”; a condition which erodes the capacity of many female-headed households to establish and maintain independent homes.” (p. 5)

In the same report, however, the Danish researchers Munk et al., 2000 (p. 115 –124), have another point of view opposing the concept of the feminisation of poverty which the underlying assumption seems to be that without male support women are at risk of social exclusion from society.

“We would claim that for most women the availability of paid work, contraceptives, abortion, child care services and welfare benefits have altered the traditional patterns of male dominance. However, importantly we would also stress that while the structural and legal conditions of the welfare state provide protection for women under threat from homelessness, this does not mean that there is no female homelessness in Denmark. Rather we would argue that an understanding of female homelessness and social exclusion requires that we identify the exceptional nature of the problem and the exceptional pathways and routes into homelessness.” (Munk et al., 2000: 115)

We are also here left with the problem of how to measure homelessness. First, it must again be clear that we can only measure number of users of services. The so-called hidden female homelessness is outside the scope of this article. So what we are talking about is the proportion of women among users of shelters, hostels and refuges. But will the statistics give us this information – and will it be over time? That is the theme for the next section.

Our previous findings regarding the development in number of users of institutions for homeless suggested that comparisons between the data from Statistics Denmark and The Social Appeal Board should be considered with care, and especially that you might expect deviations between the proportion of female users because 20 refuges are covered by Statistics Denmark but left out by the Social Appeal Board.

In table 6, we present the number of services and the proportion of women included in our two sources distinguishing between shelters/hostels and refuges. It should be noticed that Statistics Denmark began to differentiate between male and female users in 1995 whereas the Social Appeal Board has been differentiating in all their publications.

Table 5: Services and proportion of women distributed according to year.

	Shelters/hostels*		Refuges		Total
	Services	Percent women	Services	Percent women	Percent women
1995	61	14	15	93	23
1996	62	13	18	92	24
1997	65	14	18	93	24
1998	66	16	20	93	26
1999	61	15	21	90	24
2000	62	15	22	91	26
2001	61	17	24	92	27
2002	63	17	24	93	26
2002**	63	21	4	87	25

Source: Munk et al., 2000 and Statistics Denmark (2003, 2002, 2001, 1999, 1998, 1997)

* Includes reception centres, hostels, contact centres, protected boarding houses, and community homes.

** The Social Appeal Board.

When we look at the total proportion of women, the number has increased only slightly since the mid-90s fluctuating around 25 percent in recent years. It may surprise that the number of women only seems to increase slightly even though more and more refugees are included in the material from Statistics Denmark. The reason for this, however, cannot be answered by the data and the further information we have received from Statistics Denmark, consulting a report published by the Organisation of Refugees in Denmark might, on the contrary, indicate part of an explanation.

In the reports published by the Organization of Refugees in Denmark the capacity – that is the number of places – as well as the total number of enrolments of each service is presented. The report about the refugees in 2002 gives information about 17 out of the 20 refugees included in the statistics from Statistic Denmark and left out by the Social Appeal Board. These 17 refugees had a capacity of 108 places – targeting at women – and 992 enrolments were registered in 2002, maybe including some double counting. With an assumed coverage rate of 100 percent we can infer that 119 women were enrolled at these 17 refugees each week in 2002.¹⁹ It is now possible to extract these 119 women from the data published by Statistics Denmark and to estimate the proportion of women in the statistics published by Statistics Denmark excluding these 17 refugees. Doing this we will obtain an estimate of the proportion of female users more or less similar to the one given by the Social Appeal Board. The result – when excluding the 17 services covered by the Organization of Refugees in Denmark – is that about 22 percent of the population staying at the services included by Statistics Denmark was women.²⁰ This still shows a difference in the proportion of female users at about 3 percent between the Social Appeal Board and Statistics Denmark, but this might be explained by the simplifying assumptions we have made, by the fact that these two sources do not include exactly the same services – there are other differences than the 17 refugees as stated above and still three refugees are not covered by the Organization of Refugees in Denmark, and presumably by misreporting by the different services. In other words, we can only partly explain why the

¹⁹ The calculation is the following: Assuming that 108 were enrolled on January 1, you will then have $992 - 108 / 52.18$ new enrolments every week. In total, this amount to about 119 individuals enrolled at these 17 refugees each week in 2002. A problem is that it includes double counting, but at present that is the best we can do.

²⁰ In 2002, 2,223 individuals were registered by Statistics Denmark as 24-hour users during one week, and 576 of these individuals were women. If we extract 119 individuals from 576 it means that we have 457 individuals who stayed at all services minus the 17 refugees included by Statistics Denmark. The proportion of women is estimated as follows: $(576 - 119) / (2.223 - 119) = 22$ percent.

number of refugees included by Statistics Denmark does not contribute to significant differences when comparing these findings with the report published by the Social Appeal Board.

Concerning the feminisation of homeless in Denmark we have to conclude that we might register an indication of slightly more women at the services for homeless people at present comparing with the middle of the 90s. But furthermore, we also want to emphasize that we are not able to exactly explain the equal proportion of the number of female users in the official material available at the moment. We can conclude that it is not exactly the same individuals and services that are counted in the two statistics and, therefore, a conclusion about the number of female users of the services for homeless is difficult.

2.4. More and more foreigners?

“In the last 5-10 years the number of homeless with another ethnic background than Danish has increased significantly in Copenhagen. Figures from the City of Copenhagen show that homeless immigrants now amount to a third of all the homeless in Copenhagen.”
(Information, 2004)

The topic of ethnic minorities and homelessness – or of foreigners and homelessness – is not new. Very basically "lodgings" in the original meaning of the term were set up for travellers/ foreigners. The discussion that relates to "foreigners" and institutions for the homeless has two very different tones. The question can be asked out of an interest in whether "foreigners" are marginalized in society. The other angle is whether the “right” homeless persons are living at the “right” institutions – in this case are "foreigners" taking up places from the "genuine" homeless? And are the services suited to meet the challenges from users of other ethnic backgrounds?

Looking back to 1929, when people wishing to stay at an institution for the homeless in the City of Copenhagen were required to register at a Central Office, we find that foreigners represented around 1/8 of all enrolments (Socialministeriet, 1931/ 32). Their nationality is not further specified. In 1972, a working group set up to examine the future of shelters and reception centres (Socialministeriet, 1972) divided its clientele by nationality. At that time, almost every fifth individual wishing to enter a service was not Danish – almost all of them were from another Nordic country, with Norway and Finland as the largest contributors and Sweden the smallest. A survey from 1989 by the Association of County Councils arrived at a figure of 9 percent users – 7 percent of the male users and 16 percent of the female users were foreigners, without any further information as to origins and reasons for being here. The topic was not of particular interest at that time. It is a relatively new phenomenon that "the many immigrants" at institutions for the homeless have become an issue as part of the description of the new homeless and the new pressure on the homeless sector.

Table 6 gives information about the ethnicity of (enrolments of) individuals in section 94 accommodations (boformer) and in refuges for women within the last three years. As can be seen, Danish nationals still constitutes the largest group whereas the proportion of users from countries outside the EU and Scandinavia has been at the level of 5 percent at the section 94 accommodations (boformer). But it should be taken into consideration that the category “Unknown” is used in more than 10 percent of the cases.

In the City of Copenhagen the picture is, however, different. About 20 percent are nationals from a non-EU (and non-Nordic) country, and the nationality is unknown for between 27 and 31 percent of the registrations, which might indicate that this category is mostly used when a user is from a non-EU and non-Nordic country, even though that is not verified. Vincenti states that almost 90 percent of all registrations of ethnic minorities (in 1999) took place in Copenhagen, Frederiksberg, and Århus. But even in Copenhagen, no change can be found over this short span of years. Järvinen comments on a study published by the City of Copenhagen in 2000. In this study, 670 new users of the institutions for homeless in 1999 were born outside the EU and the Nordic countries. Further in the report published by the City of Copenhagen – according to Järvinen – it is stated that the proportion of foreigners only amounted to 14 percent in the beginning of the 90s.²¹

Table 6: Enrollments in section 94 accommodations (“boformer”) according to the Social Appeal Board and in refuges according to LOKK’s statistics distributed according to citizenship 2000-2002.

	Boformer 2000	Refuges 2000	Boformer 2001	Refuges 2001	Boformer 2002	Refuges 2002	Boformer 2003	Refuges 2003
Danish	83	66	82	63	81	67	79	64
Others	6	29	6	32	6	30	6	31
Unknown	11	6	12	5	13	3	15	5
Total	100	101	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Den Sociale Ankestyrelse, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004; Formidlingscentret, 2003, 2004.

Note 1: The percentages are based on enrolments not on individuals.

Note 2: “Danish” citizenship includes Denmark, Greenland and The Faroe Islands. “Others” include all other countries. LOKK/Formidlingscenteret does not differentiate between EU/Nordic and other countries concerning citizenship, whereas the Social Appeal Board does. From The Social Appeal Board we can see that only 1 percent is citizen in an EU/Nordic country. Looking at the country of birth of the users of refuges we see that about 15 percent of the women born outside Denmark are born in an EU/Nordic country.

If we take a look at the refuges we get another picture with a much higher proportion of non-Danes, but still we do not see any change over time worth noticing. The number of refuges included in the statistics has increased from 33 to 37 in the period. In terms of refuges, the proportion becomes somewhat higher if we look at registration of place of birth instead of nationality, and it also becomes evident that the majority (85 percent) of all the refuges users who are not born in Denmark are from non-EU countries with Turkey, Former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Somalia as the biggest contributors. We can also see that the number of women born outside Denmark is considerably higher than the number without a Danish citizenship. This suggests that the same result might be seen among the users of section 94-accommodations (boformer) did we only have the information of ethnic background.

²¹ The question of homeless ethnic minorities has caused a lot of attention lately in both Denmark and Europe. In Denmark, Järvinen, 2004 and Tilia & Vincenti, 2004 recently have accomplished qualitative studies about ethnic minorities staying at institutions for homeless in the Copenhagen area. Järvinen, which also includes some statistical material based on the interviewing of 25 men and some professionals working with homelessness, focuses both on the strangeness and marginalization this people experience as well as on their life-stories. Tilia & Vincenti also highlight why people of another ethnic background than Danish end up in homelessness and discuss their degree of marginalization. Here focus is also on how to improve the public effort to combat homelessness among ethnic minorities. Tilia & Vincenti have interviewed 19 individuals (2 women and 17 men) and studied public journals of 11 of the interviewees. At the EU-level Meert et al., 2003, and Edgar et al., 2003, discuss the quantitative material available in the different EU-member states.

4. Conclusion

In many ways, our discussion concerning development in the age of the users, their sex and ethnicity points to the heart of trying to understand homelessness. Problems arise when trying to define and characterize homelessness and the homeless. The definition is decisive for whom we include and for our understanding of the development and the patterns.

As our point of departure, we took the definition in the Danish Law on Social Service and described the development in user-group of institutions – or accommodations (“boformer”) – and services under this section of the law. Looking at the users of the services is not the same as trying to say something about the total number of homeless people. When looking at the users of the institutions we only give a picture of these people, not a picture of homelessness as such.

We have tried to discuss the development in the age, the sex and the ethnic background of the users by comparing different previous information with data collected very recently. These discussions – or more exactly the data they were based on – have raised difficulties, which point to our main conclusion. What we have seen is that it is very hard to discuss patterns and development in homelessness because our categorization is not stable. Different people are included and different services are considered institutions and services for homeless people. We see that the institutions included in the different statistics change and, therefore, those who are considered as being homeless change as well – when relying on the official statistics. By this we want to underline that our other conclusions about pattern and development should be handled with great care.

The figures indicate, however, a rather high degree of stability in the number and kind of individuals who have used the services under section 105/ 94 during the last decade. This could, however, raise the question: how come that the many new efforts like half way houses, supported accommodations, etc., which have been established during the last decade, have not affected the number of users of the central services for homeless. Does this indicate a hidden increase in the need for services, a place to live – not to talk of homelessness? This is a question that can not be answered.

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