

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE

The changing profiles  
of homeless people:  
Conflict, rooflessness  
and the use of public space

*Henk Meert, Karen Stuyck, Pedro José Cabrera,  
Evelyn Dyb, Maša Filipovič, Péter Györi, Ilja Hradecký,  
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**FEANTSA**

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- The changing role of the state
- The changing profiles of homeless people
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*“Streets and the subway.... for most people, they are for commuting between home and office.*

*They are not for sleep. People sleep at home. Parks are not designed for cooking or urinating,*

*people do these things at home. Private and public spaces complement each other, so do the typical*

*activities done at each. These complementary roles work well for those who have access to both,*

*but are disastrous for people who live their lives on shared ground (Waldron, 1991).”*

# Introduction

## 1 Three central research questions

This report has emerged from one of the research working groups of the European Observatory on Homelessness, dealing with the changing profiles of homeless people in the European Union. Fieldwork has been executed in seven European member states (the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, Hungary, Belgium), and Norway. Although Belgium is not a part of this research working group, we will include important findings of a piece of research that was carried out in 2005 (Blommaert et al., 2005) concerning the changing patterns of solidarity with homeless people. Former reports already indicated changing policy-related attitudes towards homelessness in the Western world. These changes clearly reflect a more repressive trend. Roofless people are continuously confronted with a hostile (urban) environment, which not only holds them to blame them for residing in public spaces, but which, at its most dramatic, can even constitute a death threat (the analysis of Cabrera, applied to El Pais and El Mundo, shows for instance a group of ‘well-to-do’ young people who were arrested in Barcelona accused of “happy slapping” beggars and recording it on their mobile phones, for fun).

This is the background against which the study’s objective - to take stock of the use that homeless people make of public space - was framed. We shall deal with three crucial questions regarding the use of public space by homeless people: firstly, which space they use, and why; secondly, what homeless people’s perceptions of public space are; and finally, whether they experience conflict in the use of public space. Public space refers to all those areas of passage to which everyone has direct and unrestricted access, and

which are customarily common property or part of the public domain. However, public space is not understood as a single entity, but rather as something with many different interpretations from both a legal and a cultural point of view. It can include areas as diverse as government administration buildings or the vestibule of an airport, from a public square to the virtual space through which we surf on the Internet. It is important to note that public space is not a uniform space, but can be differentiated into categories. We will follow Carmona (Carmona et al., 2003) in distinguishing between external public space, internal public space and quasi-public space. External public spaces are public squares, streets, parks, parking lots and the like. Internal public spaces are public institutions such as libraries and museums. Quasi-public spaces are places that are legally private but are a part of the public domain, such as shopping malls, campuses, sports grounds and in some countries the privatised transport facilities. These are places which are privately owned but where everyone should have the right to enter. To deny a person admittance has to be explained or justified by arguing that the person is violating specific rules and regulations. The primary focus of the report is the so-called external public space. However, there is a significant development towards an increase in the number of quasi-public spaces, which has important implications for homeless people. Every square foot of land in our cities is being used commercially or productively and public spaces nowadays are more the exception than the rule. Indeed, even in public space, it is easy to see how many of its more characteristic elements have been taken over, managed and regulated by privately-owned companies (such as security companies, sub-contractors in charge of cleaning the parks and public gardens, social services out-sourced to companies by town councils, etc.).

The target group of this research is homeless people who spend most of their day in public spaces, people who have no home of their own, sleep rough or possibly use night shelters. These are also people dependent on various emergency services. According to the European ETHOS typology they belong to the “roofless” category. They are in a situation of triple exclusion - social (no private or safe place for social relations), legal (not having a legal title to a space or exclusive possession) and physical (not having an abode) (Meert et al., 2004). Besides roofless people, we also interviewed people who according to the European ETHOS-typology belong to the “houseless” category, or people with inadequate housing. The latter group mainly includes squatters, people who have illegal occupation of a building. Public space is particularly important for all the interviewees; however, their use of public space and their relationship to it might differ.

## 2 Public order and changes in access to public space

Our starting point is the hypothesis of Neil Smith (1996, 2002) who designates with the concept of a ‘revanchist city’ the disciplining and security reaction of the well-to-do classes, who are installed in the gentrified neighbourhoods, against the poor and the homeless. This notion of a revanchist urbanism can be explained by two interrelated processes. Firstly, the ongoing globalisation and flexibility of capitalist accumulation strategies urges local authorities to stabilise the social climate in cities. Heightened state activism in terms of social control and thus the emergence of a more authoritarian state is the outcome at present of this new policy line. Secondly, most cities worldwide, embedded in a realm of neoliberalism, also experience an increasingly significant process of gentrification. Urban revanchism is then, following Smith, clearly linked to the preservation of the ongoing gentrification process in Western cities. MacLeod (2002) states that revanchist interventions in the city appear to be ‘reclaiming public spaces for those groups who possess economic value as producers or consumers to the virtual exclusion of the less well-heeled’.

There is a stronger and stronger tendency toward private take-over of what was public. More and more there are private districts and estates, with restricted-access streets and a permanent security force to throw out all those who have not been specifically invited in. When the credentials to enter many places, that up until very recently were public, open and free, have become more demanding and arbitrary, (to wear certain brands, to be a certain age or have a certain attitude can be the key which opens or closes the entrance to many ‘public’ establishments) it becomes more and more important to demand a clear, safe statute of access, use and presence in those places that were previously open to all, including homeless and excluded people. Low and Smith (2006) explain in their contribution that the control of public space is a central strategy of neo-liberalism. This seems quite clear when we analyse certain projects for urban renewal, where the relocating and removing of people who are homeless and the services which they use seem to be becoming the norm. This can only be understood as part of a policy of ownership which requires a change in the use of the surrounding public spaces, in order to push up the capital gains in a real estate market which is enormously sensitive to aesthetic and environmental aspects.

Firstly, Smith argues that one of the outcomes of the new policy line is heightened state activism in terms of social control. Examples include the famous posters in the New York subway (‘if you see something, say something’) or the omniscient, all-seeing eye that warns visitors to some middle-class neighbourhoods that all the people living there are watching them (neighbourhood watch stickers). In the European context, we have to deal critically with the notion of a revanchist city. Rather than taking revenge, many of the involved actors (not only society, but also politicians, security guards) aim to ‘correct,’ and in the most extreme form, to remove, a specific social group that is living on a certain territory. We notice important dissimilarities in law between the different European countries. In **Belgium** for instance, the act that prohibited vagrancy was abolished in 1993. Until then, the Belgian policy towards homeless people was characterised by anti-urbanism and repression. Vagrants (the term “homeless people” was not yet used) who were encountered while sleeping or begging in public spaces and who were not in possession of a minimum amount of money, were to be removed to so-called “colonies” in the rural periphery of the country.

The new law in 1993 (this law mentioned homelessness for the first time), states that homeless people should no longer be punishable and should now be treated in special reception centres, which should prepare them for reintegration in society. Also, in **France** the begging and vagrancy prohibition disappeared from the penal code in 1994. Concerning the topic of begging, a variation of rules can be observed. In **Norway** for instance, begging has been formally legalised since January 2006, while in **Slovenia** begging has been prohibited by law. In the past, this was punished by imprisonment of up to 60 days (Law on offence against public order and peace, 2003). According to the new Act on protection of public order and peace (APPOP), that has been adopted in June 2006, there is a fine for the person *found begging for money or other material goods in an intrusive or offensive way (article 9 of APPOP) or sleeping in public places that are not intended for this purpose and where this is causing problems for someone (article 10 of APPOP)*. These articles have received a lot of criticism, as it seems irrational to fine homeless persons who in general have no money. Besides, these rules can be interpreted freely by the authorities.

Although in many countries the legislation towards begging has been weakened or re-orientated towards reintegration in society, the control of homeless people and beggars is enormous increased in quasi-public spaces. In France for instance, even though begging no longer figures in the penal code, it is still forbidden to beg in the railway stations and trains. Also in other countries (for Germany see Busch-Geertsema, 2006) where the public transport and public transport facilities are being (partly) privatised, we notice the organisation of certain rules to control those quasi-public places.

Secondly, Smith claims that the growing trend towards gentrification and the reclaiming of public spaces by those groups who have economic value as producers and as consumers leads to a restricted access to public space for the less well-heeled. In the following section, some of these phenomena will be discussed in relation to the situation in Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain.

The Marolles neighbourhood is situated in the southern part of the historic centre of Brussels (**Belgium**) and is located at about 500 metres from the Grand Place and about 300 meters from the South Station. Since the middle ages, this neighbourhood has been a traditional gate to the city, housing immigrants and poor (Mistiaen, 2002). Those who were rejected from society (the Marolles hosted the leper colony of the city) or those who wanted to have an alternative lifestyle, found a place here. This otherness is still reflected in the neighbourhood's infrastructure. Three examples reflect this: first, it still has the largest second-hand market of Brussels on its territory. Second, the neighbourhood is dominated by the central law courts, a nineteenth century urban intervention in order to discipline and to control the deviant behaviour of the neighbourhood's residents. Third, a particular kind of infrastructure also reflects the historical and endlessly reproduced deprivation of the Marolles, that is its age-old reception infrastructure for homeless people (often embedded in a religious charitable context). There is a clear concentration of different kinds of infrastructure for homeless people in this neighbourhood. However, more recent initiatives are not established in this part of the Marolles. There is a clear shift to locate new services for homeless people to the western part of the historic city centre. This evolution may reflect two interrelated trends: the subtle upgrading of the Marolles and the further marginalisation of the western part of the inner city. The gentrification in the Marolles is not only a tale of young, mainly single residents who discovered this relative cheap housing market in the early 1990s. Since the late 1980s, more and more up-market antiques shops, trendy bars and restaurants discovered the neighbourhood. From these two components of gentrification (residential and commercial) it follows that public spaces are no longer solely used by homeless people, locals and low-budget consumers who frequented the neighbourhood for its survival infrastructure. Gentrifying residents and middle and upper-class consumers, claim a prominent place in the Marolles, together with fashionable shop- and barkeepers who, for instance, set up pavement cafés. This last example evidently points to a subtle privatisation of the public space in The Marolles.

In **Spain**, a very explicit transformation of public space has taken place. At the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, due to the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy, the streets were reclaimed by the citizens. Every district, every demonstration, every social or sports event became a chance to make up for lost time. In the 1990s another type of gathering in public space began to take place. The phenomenon known as the 'big bottle' brought hundreds or even thousands of young people outdoors to meet and drink alcohol. The high price of the drinks in bars and the fact of being young and wanting to be together and have fun, are the arguments of the young people to explain this new kind of leisure activity. This behaviour awoke suspicion, apprehension, fear and even aggression on the part of the average citizen. Along with the 'big bottle', another new use of public space are the so-called 'blanket hits' which refers to the rise on almost all the pavements of a myriad of sellers of illegal copies of music, imitation bags, etc. The social visibility of this phenomenon has been increased by the fact that in many cases the people who try to earn their living in this way are undocumented immigrants. These two new phenomena have entered into the public space in large Spanish cities, traditionally occupied by other types of people: street prostitutes, drug dealers and homeless people. These phenomena have produced a breeding ground for all kinds of personal and collective paranoia. Private, closed spaces have appeared everywhere, fenced off and designed to isolate and impede the passage or permanent presence of those who have been defined as adversaries, real or symbolic enemies (see Davis, 2001). An enormous effort in design, aimed at driving away the undesirables, can be seen in the architecture, urban furniture or sign-posting. Anti-homeless benches, gates and fences, apparently innocent decorative elements, are spreading all over the city.

**Luxembourg** City has experienced a sharp rise in immigration. This is one of the structural changes brought about in the Grand Duchy by the decline of the iron and steel industry and the establishment of a financial market, with 162 financial institutions in 2004. This development of the economy's service orientation, as well as the growing number of banks and European institutions in Luxembourg City, have reshaped the population mix. The now more numerous affluent groups are concentrated in the upper city centre, but also gradually spreading out to other districts. Smith (1996, p.88) argues that gentrification forms part of a general process of redevelopment driven by the restoration of profit margins. Also, property prices (or the prices of private space) are very high in Luxembourg City, putting ownership or tenancies of decent housing in Luxembourg City (and elsewhere in the country) almost beyond the reach of low-income groups. The presence of affluent foreign communities in Luxembourg attracts hordes of developers looking to maximise profit margins. The Pétrusse Valley, for example, situated in the centre of Luxembourg City, is often cited as a refuge by homeless people, but is also appreciated by other groups for entirely different reasons:

*"We are developing a luxury city-centre residential complex, that will be the beginning of a new very large-scale urban development... With an absolutely unparalleled and exceptional view of the Pétrusse Valley, it is a prime location for mixed housing, property, or office developments. The X Group will be building two five- and four-star hotels with a combined total of 280 rooms" (Vandermeir, 2005).*

The changes in public space and the increased visibility of homeless people led to the Luxembourg City squats being shut down in winter 2002-2003, after which a process was set going to decentralize homeless services into other municipalities around the country.

# Methodology

## 1 Semi-structured interviews with homeless people

The approach in the present report is based around a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews. In each country, at least four homeless people were interviewed using a shared questionnaire. In general, the interviews were not strongly structured to begin with and were therefore initially regarded as narratives: conversations in which people pass on experiences, feelings, opinions and anecdotes relating to the public space and to the places they use to organise their daily life. The shared questionnaire included topics about the use of public space by homeless people (where do they sleep, beg, socialise, find food and beverage; which places are used for personal hygiene); homeless people’s perceptions of public space (where they feel at home, dignity issues...); and finally also the conflicts in the use of public space (conflicts with the police, security guards, other users of public space,...). Asking questions about the daily organisation of someone’s life or the places where someone feels at home, is something

that demands time and mutual respect. It was not always easy to discuss every specific topic with the interviewees, because of mistrust or a lack of time. People also want to present themselves to best effect, and it was not always possible to detect if someone was telling the truth. In some cases, it was also difficult to introduce the conflicts in public space into the conversation, since in many cases the interviewee began by denying having experience of conflictual situations as a way of defending himself from a possible reproach that might identify him as a conflictual or problematic person. Nevertheless, when the interview lasted a bit longer, stories about experiences appeared which showed the tension and violence that living outdoors brought with it. The selection of the respondents was carried out so that the sample includes men and women, younger and older people, and representatives of ethnic and other minority groups.

A total of 64 in-depth interviews were carried out with homeless people (see table 1).

	Semi-structured interviews	Location (semi-structured interviews)	Existing research/sources	Observation
Czech Republic	6	Prague and surrounding	5	Carried out
Luxembourg	4	Luxembourg-ville	1	Carried out
Hungary	8	Budapest + countryside	3	Carried out
Spain	7	Madrid	1	Carried out
France	6	Paris	3	Carried out
Slovenia	15	Ljubljana(11) /Maribor(4)	1	Carried out
Norway	6	Oslo	4	Carried out
Belgium	12	Brussels	0	Carried out
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>		<b>17</b>	

In the case of the **Czech Republic**, the preparation of these interviews included professional consultations with researchers, public administration workers, street workers, social workers, day centre employees, a doctor and with professionals implementing relevant projects. A hypothesis was drafted, based on the experience of street workers and workers of walk-in services, that people who seek help in day centres have a different survival strategy from those who do not seek out this help. In order to confirm or negate this hypothesis, respondents were selected from two different environments. In order to compare both environments, three interviews were carried out with clients of a day centre and three with people living outside. The latter three interviews were done together with street workers, directly in the locations the respondents consider their homes. Also in other countries (Slovenia and France) this division can be made. Interviews with the first group happened in the day centre itself. During periods of freezing weather, the day centre is open at night, providing homeless people with a shelter where they can sleep on chairs or on the floor. Workers in the day centre suggested that respondents should be chosen from those who often visit the day centre but are not even interested in accommodation in the night shelter. They all gave their answers willingly. For interviews with the second group, we visited three locations in two different areas in Prague easily accessible by tram. These locations are neither on the outer edge of the city, nor in its centre. The first one is a former set of allotment gardens, which has been abandoned for several years and is overgrown with shrubbery; the plot is probably owned by the city. Until recently, there were huts standing in the allotments, inhabited by a larger number of homeless people, but just a short time ago the city authorities had them torn down. The second location is a natural wood with a low building, unfinished for several decades and rather derelict. The choice of these respondents was completely incidental, based on the willingness of those present to talk.

**In Spain**, fieldwork was carried out during the last few days of the month of June (2006). This fieldwork consists of seven open-style interviews with people who live on the streets of Madrid. Five of them were contacted through the Open Centre, a municipal centre that remains open 24 hours a day to cater for those persons who live in the street and who can not or do not want to go to a shelter. Two other persons were interviewed in the shelter run by the San Martin de Porres foundation. Those people had recently spent a long time on the street.

In the **Norwegian capital Oslo**, we completed 6 interviews. Three of those interviewed were actually sleeping rough at the time of the interviews, while the other three persons had a place to stay but had been living outside for many years. In addition, three employees of the outreach drug prevention services in Oslo and two employees at the Salvation Army centre for drug users were interviewed. All the interviews with homeless people were carried out in the Salvation Army day centre, with one exception. This Salvation Army Centre is a café serving free foods and drinks. The facilities are simple with space for around 60 persons. At the café there is also a possibility to take a shower, to shave and to have a limited amount of clothes washed. To get in touch with the homeless interviewees we started in the morning at the Salvation centre sitting at a table having a cup of coffee. We visited the centre at three different occasions and stayed there for around five hours each time. The place was always very busy. An employee at the SA centre estimates that half of the visitors have no fixed abode. The first day at the centre, two persons approached us after about one hour. Later, we were put in touch with other persons by employees at the centre (one interviewee or by other interviewees).

The interviews in **Slovenia** were carried out in May-June (2006). The majority of the interviews (11) were done in Ljubljana, while 4 interviews were done in the second largest city of Slovenia (Maribor). The qualitative research in **Hungary** is based on 8 excerpts from interviews carried out by the Edge Foundation. This is one of the social services that conduct empirical research in order to understand better the life and problems of people living in the streets. Interviews were conducted with homeless people both in Budapest and in the countryside.

In the case of **Luxembourg**, four homeless people contacted via a Luxembourg City day shelter volunteer worker were interviewed. In **France**, 6 homeless people were interviewed - one in the Gare du Nord mainline railway station concourse (Paris), four in the Gare du Nord district (10<sup>th</sup> district) and one in rue d'Alésia. In **Belgium**, all interviewees (12) had been living outside for many years, but are now staying in a homeless hostel, are living with friends or are living on their own. All persons still receive individual assistance from several social services and the interviews were carried out through the help of these services. Because of the different approach in the Belgium case, the underlying questionnaire deals with slightly different topics concerning their daily life and the corresponding use of public space. Besides interviews with homeless people, several key actors (such as policy-makers, third sector organisations, individual citizens, local shopkeepers and security guards) were interviewed. The fieldwork was carried out in Brussels inner city districts (with special attention to one of Brussels' best known deprived neighbourhoods, the Marolles, currently undergoing a subtle process of gentrification).

## 2 The implementation of existing research

As well as carrying out in-depth interviews with 52 homeless persons, we also included some results of existing research.

In the **Czech Republic**, 5 existing researches are used in this report. The first two researches were commissioned by the local administration of the Prague 11 and the Prague 5 districts (SN, 2005; SN, 2006). They asked for an analysis of homelessness on their territory. An NGO, which engages in street work, carried out the survey. The Prague 11 District is a peripheral district in the southern part of Prague. A major part of its territory is built-up with housing estates (prefabricated panel blocks of flats), from the 1970s. During the survey, the field workers identified a total of 49 persons (all of them men) as being roofless. The Prague 5 District was an industrial suburb of Prague and in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century an industrial part of the city. Today, after a radical change over the last 15 years, it is a business, cultural and residential area and can be considered as an extended city centre. Due to the size of the city district and the large number of persons with socially pathological behaviour, it was beyond the capacity of the street workers to systematically cover the entire territory. Therefore, the areas surrounding Andel metro station, Smichov train station and Novy Smichov shopping centre were examined.

In these areas, a total of 482 persons were homeless (56 women). In the eight squats that were visited, they approached another 134 persons (50 of them are voluntary squatters who do not consider themselves homeless). The third piece of research used is a monitoring report from a project currently carried out by a group of NGOs. The data from the homeless Census of Prague (Hradecky, 2004) are also integrated. Finally, the report of the Winter Emergency Centre Letna<sup>1</sup> gives some detailed information about the persons who used this emergency centre at the beginning of 2006. After several frosty days at the beginning of 2006, the battalion of the Armed Forces set up 8 tents with a capacity of 160 places to sleep (the so-called Winter Emergency Centre Letna).

In **Luxembourg**, a series of open interviews were done with homeless people in 2005 as groundwork for a quantitative survey of homeless and inadequately housed groups. Re-analysis of these interviews brought to light some elements of relevance to the issues of this study.

For **France**, 3 studies are used in this report. Firstly, the INSEE survey done between 15 January and 15 February 2001 among shelter and hot meal distribution service users in urban centres with populations over 20 000, in which 4 084 French-speaking service users were questioned. 3 525 of all respondents self-reported as homeless, i.e., they had spent the previous night in a shelter or sleeping in a location not meant for human habitation (street, makeshift shelter). Secondly, the Paris social SAMU monitoring centre's quantitative and qualitative research on the concept of territory among homeless people, done between October 1999 and October 2000. Finally, the BVA polling institute's survey among a representative sample of the Emmaüs association's accommodation centre users, in which 401 homeless people aged 18 years and over were questioned between 17 November and 5 December 2005. In **Spain**, we will use, besides the seven interviews, a few fragments from interviews carried out only a few years ago and some news items which appeared in the press concerning violence suffered by homeless people in the last few months. A particular focus will be put on one case which occurred in Barcelona at the end of 2005.

In **Slovenia**, we will also refer to a secondary source, the Street Journal 'Kralji Ulice'. This journal includes interviews and articles written by homeless people or by people working with them. We analysed four issues, published from the end of 2005 until June 2006.

<sup>1</sup> The information was e-mailed by Mr. Zdenek Schwarz, Director of the City of Prague Emergency Medical of organisations participating in the establishment and operation of the Winter Emergency Centre Letna.

In the case of **Hungary**, three diverse studies are incorporated. Firstly, from 1999 onwards, the situation of the homeless population in Budapest is surveyed annually, always on February the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The structured questionnaire covers all who spend the night at any of the temporary homeless hostels or night shelters as well as rough sleepers known to social services. A varying set of questions is asked in order to take a snapshot of the life of homeless people. All six surveys, conducted between 1999 and 2004 were used. Secondly, unstructured interviews with social workers who have worked in the Shelter Foundation's 'crisis car' are integrated. Those social workers tell about their experiences with roofless people and about their attitudes and strategies for finding a place to sleep. Finally, we will use a small-scale representative survey on the attitudes of Budapest residents to homeless people. Data was collected using standardised questionnaires, by trained interviewers, using the method of telephone interviews. The representative sample included 300 respondents over 18 years living in Budapest. The questionnaire covered topics about the attitudes to homeless people compared to other groups; the habits and patterns in helping homeless people; how they react to the magazine edited and sold by homeless people and what they think of the installation of armrests on benches in public spaces so as to prevent homeless people from lying on them.

In **Norway**, four recent studies concerning rough sleepers must be mentioned. A census carried out in week 48 of 2005 found that the total number of homeless people in Norway is 5 500. The number of roofless people in Oslo was between 110 and 120. Another census among rough sleepers in Oslo and initiated by the authorities of Oslo during spring 2006, confirms that the result from the national counting is not overestimating the number of homeless people. This research includes a short interview guide asking whether the person has been sleeping rough during the last month; the reason for sleeping rough; where did the person stay last night and where will he stay the next night. The net sample includes 126 persons (of whom 15 were women). A large majority (59%) had been sleeping rough for two weeks or longer. A third piece of research carried out by the city Mission project was completed during the two first weeks of June (2006). The net sample consists of 63 interviews. We also want to mention a dissertation for a Master's in criminology by Camilla Lied (2005) about beggars and street artists. Lied finds that in spite of important differences between the two groups there are similarities. Both groups spend more time in public places than most people and their ways of occupying and use the public space is considered to be semi-legal. Both street artists and beggars talk about their activity as a 'job'.

### 3 Observation

All researchers carried out some (participative) observation during the field work. Clear reproductions of the different interview-settings were given. In 4 countries, a more intensive way of observation was carried out. In the case of **Norway** one of the roofless persons guided us to some of the places where people sleep. In Oslo we also had shorter talks with other persons, e.g., with homeless passers-by, a security guard and a shop assistant during the observations. In **Luxembourg**, field observations were done on a tour of duty patrol of Luxembourg's main railway station with the station police after the last night shelter in Luxembourg City had closed its doors around midnight. It gave an opportunity to talk to the police officers who deal with the station area, with all its problems of homelessness, prostitution and drug-addiction, and to find out what places homeless and roofless people use that the police know about. In **Belgium**, the researchers had the possibility to participate with a private security company (B-security) responsible for security in Brussels-Midi/Zuid Station. This is not the only company active in this site. During the observation, it became clear that different security actors (B-security, group 4, and the federal and local police) are at work in the same place, but are operating in a different way. In **Slovenia**, observation included mapping the homeless population in the city of Ljubljana. It gives a rough indication of the places where homeless people congregate and which places they use the most often.

### 4 Profiles of homeless people

In order to describe the profiles of the homeless people, we will focus in this section on the different characteristics of the persons interviewed. If possible, we will also illustrate some characteristics of respondents from other studies.

#### 4.1 GENDER

Because of gender differences in the use, perceptions and possible conflicts in public space, we tried to interview both men and women. Notwithstanding this intention, it turned out to be more difficult to interview women who are roofless. In three countries (**Hungary, France and Slovenia**) all respondents were male. In **Norway**, we interviewed only one woman, in **Luxembourg** and the **Czech Republic** we contacted two women and in **Spain and Belgium** three of the interviewees were female. In the case of the **Czech Republic** the female respondents were both squatters living with a male companion. They are both living in a wood with low buildings, unfinished for several decades and quite derelict. One woman is living with her husband in a tent in front of the buildings, while

the other woman is living in the derelict brick building with her boyfriend. This strategy of finding a partner so as not to be alone on the street is also recognizable in other studies. On Sunday 29 January 2006, a statistical survey was carried out in the Winter Emergency Centre Letna (the **Czech Republic**) between 8 and 9 pm. At the time of the survey, 227 persons were present in the centre, of whom 21 were women (9%). Most of these women were accompanied by a male partner. Single women only used the tents sporadically. In the beginning, one tent was reserved only for women but this seemed to be unnecessary. The women refused to be separated from their partners and wanted to spend the night in the same tent as their partner. Other studies also emphasize the greater visibility of roofless men. The **Czech** research carried out in the Prague 11 district and the Prague 5 district for instance, identified a total 531 roofless persons; only 56 of them were female. They also visited eight squats where they approached 134 persons (including 22 women). In the report profiling the users of emergency services, Meert (et al., 2005), describes the predominance of men in the shelters (approximately 90% of the users of emergency shelters were men). The female respondent in **Norway** didn't like the hostels either. She said that it is too difficult to adjust to the rules, but above all she was not allowed to stay there with her boyfriend.

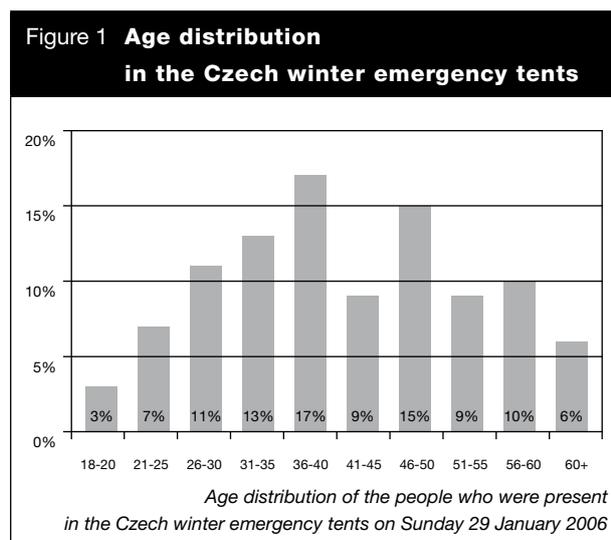
	Male	Female	Total
Czech Republic	4	2	6
Luxembourg	2	2	4
Hungary	8	0	8
Spain	4	3	7
France	6	0	6
Slovenia	15	0	15
Norway	5	1	6
Belgium	9	3	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>64</b>

#### 4.2 AGE STRUCTURE

Table 3 shows the age structure of the interviewees in the eight different countries. Only 2 persons are younger than 25 years, 21 respondents have an age between 25 and 45 and 36 persons are older than 45. The age of 5 persons was indeterminable. In 7 countries we did not interview any roofless person younger than 25.

	< 25	25-45	45+	un-known	Total
Czech Republic	0	2	4	0	6
Luxembourg	2	1	1	0	4
Hungary	0	2	6	0	8
Spain	0	2	5	0	7
France	0	1	1	4	6
Slovenia	0	6	8	1	15
Norway	0	4	2	0	6
Belgium	0	3	9	0	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>64</b>

Because of the profiles of the persons interviewed in **Belgium** (they all had a long history of homelessness, but are now living in a hostel or on their own), it is evident that there were no young persons among the interviewees. In **Norway**, observation in the Salvation Army centre teaches us that there were no relatively young persons in there. A survey among beggars in Oslo also shows that the youngest beggar is 24 years old. Two employees from outreach services told us that young people, who are not marked by years of drug use and rooflessness more easily find a place to sleep with a girl- or boyfriend or with other friends and acquaintances. However, the statistical survey carried out in the **Czech** winter emergency tents, shows opposite findings (see figure 1).



This figure indicates an age structure that corresponds with the typical age structure of the Czech homeless population. We notice a disturbingly high percentage of young people. Apparently, in the city of Prague many young roofless persons have spent the night in the provided tents. Figure 1 also indicates that most homeless people (in Prague) are of working age, with a drop around the age of 40. For the other countries, we could not find any indication of the reasons for the low percentage of young people among those the interviewed.

**4.3 NATIONALITY**

43 of the 52 interviewed persons have the nationality of the country they are living in. Only 9 interviewed respondents have another nationality (mainly from Eastern Europe).

**Table 4 Nationality of interviewees**

	Non-foreign	Foreign	Total
Czech Republic	4	2: Romany from Slovakia	6
Luxembourg	2	1: Bosnia 1: Poland	4
Hungary	8	0	8
Spain	6	1: Morocco	7
France	5	1: Yugoslavia	6
Slovenia	12	3: Former Yugoslavia	15
Norway	6	0	6
Belgium	12	0	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>64</b>

The **Czech** research for the Prague 11 district shows that 11 (of the 49 roofless persons) do not have Czech citizenship, but are construction workers mainly from Slovakia and Ukraine. One of the interviewed persons, a Romany man, from East Slovakia is also a construction worker. He was staying in workmen’s hostels provided by the employers. The day he lost his job, he also lost his accommodation. The statistical survey, carried out in the winter emergency centre, showed that 33% of the accommodated persons came from Prague, 48% came from other regions of the Czech Republic, while 19% were foreigners (Slovakia, Lithuania and Ukraine).

**4.4 SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Indicating certain specific characteristics of the interviewed persons (such as drug use) is essential because of the significant extent to which they shape the use of public space and the possible conflicts which can occur. In **Norway**, the homeless services are for the most part organised in order to receive drug addicts. The public debate is mainly structured around the theme of begging and around the visibility of drug users in the city centre. Five of the six interviewed Norwegian persons frequently use drugs. Besides this drug addiction, two persons also have an alcohol abuse problem; and two persons are on a drug rehabilitation programme (methadone). In the **Czech Republic** one person had a stroke 2 years ago and is now blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. He receives a partial invalidity pension of 3000 CZK a month. Another Czech man is being treated for venous ulceration. A woman living in a tent with her husband was employed, but for half a year she has been sick with an incurable disease. None of the interviewed persons were addicted to drugs or alcohol. In **Spain**, two of the seven persons interviewed are addicted to drugs. One of these two drugs addicts tries to obtain money by means of prostitution. The other drug user has a mental illness. Two further persons were addicted to alcohol and one person had a mental illness. In **Belgium**, two of the interviewed persons had a history of drug use, but are now clean. For the other countries (France, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Hungary) we could not determine specific characteristics of those interviewed.

# Rooflessness and the use of public space

## 1 Basic needs of homeless people

Delgado (2004) states that public space, as a reality in a permanent state of emergence, is an event: a place which is not a place, but rather a “take place”. It is a pure happening, whereby public space is that which ‘only exists when it is used’, when it is ‘passed through’. In Hungary, article 27 of Act LXIII (1999) on Maintaining Law and Order on Public Property gives the following definition of public space (public property): *Public property are all public spaces owned by the state or by local governments which can be used by all for its intended purpose.*

Homeless people, who are by definition houseless and transient, are a clear part of that public space, in the places they occupy and establish themselves in at different times of the day and for different activities. Which is not to say that roofless people therefore have no living place. Street life is structured around specific places and homeless people develop a range of strategies in public spaces to take ownership of that space for private, economic, professional and social purposes. In other words, they have different territories which are occupied not at random, but specifically by the time of day.

According to the experience of social workers, two basic profiles of users of public space can be identified: the autonomous homeless and the drifting homeless. Naturally, these occupy the endpoints of the continuum, with various stages and types of transition in between.

Autonomous homeless people try to transform the public space to some kind of home. They build a shack, might have a bed to sleep on and a makeshift stove for heating and even run a household. Such people usually live in groups and often have dogs for company and protection. In a way, they are the outsiders of the homeless population. They refuse to be institutionalised, but often form relationships with local residents. They are characterised by conscious choices and the desire for progress and development, and often settle down in deserted houses, abandoned factories etc., where they tend to remain for years, or until such time as their habitat is destroyed by urban development or closure.

Drifting homeless people have no permanent place. They sleep wherever dusk finds them, often on the bare pavement. Even if they have a regular place of their own, it is not more than some kind of roof over their heads. They do not shape or develop their surroundings. Total resignation, detachment from the self, depression and psychological disorders are frequent. Outside circumstances and pressure make them move to another street, apartment block entrance, underpass or hideout.

As indicated in the chapter ‘profiles of homeless people’, the interviewed persons belong somewhere in the continuum between these two extreme points. We must take this into consideration when analysing the public spaces that are used for the daily activities of homeless people. For the purposes of the analysis, we will look at public space according to the activities it is used for; sleeping, eating, personal hygiene, begging and socialising.

### 1.1 SLEEPING

In most countries (we found some explicit citations in the interviews in Norway, Slovenia and Hungary) the weather (especially in winter) was one of the most important criteria in finding a place to sleep. A higher proportion of rough sleepers choose to take refuge at night shelters or emergency shelters during the coldest winter months. However, large numbers stay in the streets and invent clever tricks to survive the low temperatures. In **Hungary** for instance, a few years ago, a team of social workers was shocked to see a group of homeless men lying on the pavement in front of a busy railway station. It soon turned out that some underground utilities network operated by the railway makes a ‘hot line’ on the pavement, reaching temperatures of 20-25 degrees. They also came across a man who had put up a tent over the ventilation shaft of an industrial plant. He was wearing only underwear even on the coldest winter days. In **Norway** construction sites, as they are warmed up to preserve the materials, are frequently used as a place to sleep.

Other heated places, like staircases, underground stations, railway stations or waiting rooms are also frequently used as a place to sleep. Most of these places are not external public spaces (as defined by Carmona 2003), but have well-defined and unambiguous functions and purposes. Consequently, conflicts are frequent in those areas (as the space is not being used for its intended purpose). Besides the weather criteria, invisibility is another important criterion in finding a place to sleep. In **Slovenia** for instance the police do not bother homeless people if they are not seen by passers-by:

*'Police mostly persecute us in visible places. If it is not visible, they know (about us) and they leave us alone. Sometimes.'* (homeless person, Slovenia)

As indicated above, the situations of homeless people vary a great deal. Persons who can be considered as autonomous homeless often have a 'permanent' sleeping place. As Razpotnik and Dekleva (2005) noted, these homeless people have certain places, which they call their base. This base is a term for a hidden place, where they sleep. In the case of the **Czech Republic** three of the interviewed persons are in this situation. Two of the interviewed persons were living in tents, which were fixed up and furnished with all kind of objects. The third person was living in a derelict unfinished building. The place was arranged as a small flat and was divided with furniture into a kitchen and room, which serves as a bedroom and living room. Also in **Slovenia**, there are abandoned buildings, where groups of homeless people have, in a way, a permanent living space. In the **Norwegian** capital Oslo, one of the interviewees says that some homeless people might stay for periods in the woodlands surrounding the city. Some of them set up temporary shelters. The woodlands are partly owned by private persons and by the municipality. According to this interviewee, people sometimes have a silent agreement with the landowner that allows them to stay. Containers by the seafront are used from time to time as well by squatters. Many squats have been shut down in **Luxembourg**, but those that remain are still key sleeping locations. Some homeless people have effectively taken "ownership" of their squats, turning them into a space of domesticity, as this ethnographic account of a visit into the inner sanctums of homeless people in **France (Paris)** shows:

*"Swelling with pride at our visible astonishment, Louis led us under the bridge to show us the huts they had each built for themselves (...) Under the bridge, we found five shanties hand-built by Louis and his neighbours stretching along the embankment, nestling in the shelter provided by the arch. Louis described them as "bachelor pads", as well he might. Three of the five huts were completely finished, the fourth, Louis said, still needed "some doing up inside", the fifth was still unfinished, missing its door. (...) He opened up one of the huts to reveal a tiny living room with a bed, walls covered with wooden battens neatly bonded together, fitted carpets, a little gas cooker at the entrance, a table with four chairs and a clothes cupboard. Each of these dwelling places bears the imprint of its occupants: Louis' hut has a bed-spread embroidered for him by Christelle (...) We moved on to the third bed-sit, which belonged to François. The bed was unmade, and plates were strewn around the floor. Louis was quick to apologise: I keep telling him that you have to put stuff away, keep it tidy; us street people can't let things slide, you have to be strict with yourself. It's what keeps you on your guard, but François knows that and always tidies up. A bit late in the day, but that's not too bad, it's not like we're in an army camp here. (...) We continued this "guided tour of the property", and it came to me what a paradox this was, these so-called homeless men who invest so much of themselves in these essentially pass-through spaces through these objects. These are the link to their life, the ordinary life of an ordinary person" (extracted from Girola, 2006).*

The drifting homeless have no permanent place to sleep. Finding a place to sleep is more often a solitary task, although they sometime aid each other in finding an appropriate place. For those homeless there seems to be an ad hoc mode of finding a place to sleep. When comparing the indicated places in the different countries, there are a lot of similarities. In **France**, the INSEE (the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research, see Bush *et al.*, 2002) questioned habitual shelter and hot meal distribution service users in January 2001. The survey found that 8% of respondents were sleeping in a location not meant for human habitation. Half were occupying a private place (hut, factory, car, stair-well) - in one of three cases with the owner's knowledge - and half were sleeping in either closed-in (underground or mainline station, shopping centre) or open (street, public park) public spaces.

In **Luxembourg**, none of the interviewees slept at all unless they were lucky enough to secure a place in one of the night hostels:

*“The odd nights when I didn’t have a bed, I’d just trudge around the place; I’d go walking at night, and during the day I’d take trains, doing round trips and sleeping on the train (...).” (homeless person, Luxembourg)*

But a number of interviewees mentioned places where roofless people can spend the night. One well-known one is the marshalling yard where railway carriages are readied for use the next day. We checked these out on our field inspection with the police. They were not locked, the interiors were clean and warm. The police said this was a favourite spot for homeless people to sleep, as were some building sites. One interviewee also recounted his experience. The Pétrusse Valley which divides Luxembourg City into the upper town (with the Place d’Armes and pedestrian precinct) and lower town (the railway station and Bonnevoie districts) also offers places under bridges and behind undergrowth, as well as benches in open spaces for a lie-down. Car parks, bridges, block-houses and Luxembourg City park are other places where roofless people can sometimes be found sleeping. But these are gender-specific. It is obviously much more dangerous for a woman to sleep in a park at night than for a man. The police told us two ways in which homeless people find a space to spend the night, both of which are also confirmed by homeless people themselves. One is to ring all the doorbells on a block of flats until someone buzzes the door open, and then to go and sleep in the cellars. Obviously, this runs the risk of an occupier finding them and calling the police, which has happened, according to the police. The other is shopping arcades in shopping centres, used for drug-taking and drinking, or simply as somewhere to sleep..

In the **Czech Republic**, two of the interviewed men do not have a stable place for spending their nights. They use benches and trams when they feel sleepy. One woman with her husband also has experience with spending nights on trams, particularly in winter time. One man has been sleeping in a wrecked car for an extended period of time. A part of the Prague 5 city District-project, includes a questionnaire survey (50 respondents). When asked about their living place, the respondents replied as follows: in a squat (40%), in deserted structures not designed for accommodation such as sheds or garages (22%), outside in a tent or under a bridge (26%), on public transport (14%), in organisations (12%) or at friends or acquaintances (8%). The Prague Homeless Census (2004) showed that 24% the recorded homeless people spent the night in the accommodation facilities of social services although the capacity of those was almost 100% full.

In addition, a further 13% spent the freezing night on chairs or floors in day centres. The remaining approximately 63% of the homeless people did not even have a theoretical chance to use a legal shelter from the freezing weather.

In **Slovenia**, the following locations were cited as often chosen locations to sleep: public toilets (at the railway station), waiting rooms at the bus station, parking lots, doorways, basements, parks, under the bridges, railway carriages, abandoned buildings, passages and garages. As a consequence of the weather circumstances, rough sleeping is quite hard in **Norway**. As already discussed, a good place to sleep is a place where there is some heating.

When looking at the places where roofless people sleep, we still notice that a remarkable share of the respondents do not use night shelters to spend the night. The question arises: why spend the night on the streets when there are night shelters? There are several possible reasons why: lack of spare beds, overly-restrictive hostel admission conditions, a hostile atmosphere, arguments with other roofless people or shelter staff, having to share a room with others, exclusion from a shelter, a show of solidarity with an excluded friend, or simply a desire to remain independent. Weather often plays a big part: people are obviously more ready to sleep in a squat or on the street in summer than in winter.

Because of the different approach in **Belgium**, all interviewed persons had a fixed place to sleep, although they had been living rough for many years. Four of the interviewees are living in a temporary homeless hostel, four are living in a group in a sort of supported accommodation and four are living on their own.

However, the available number of public sleeping places depends sometimes on the accepting or intolerant attitude of the local community. Residents and authorities generally accept the presence of squatters and roofless persons in particular areas (such as deserted areas, abandoned factories or wastelands), whereas they are hardly tolerated in the inner cities, busy junctions and business districts. In addition to external pressures and limitations, choices of a place to sleep are also influenced by individual or group characteristics, such as lifestyle, livelihood, health, level of socialisation, attitude (hiding, exhibitionist, rebel), addiction or the proximity of previous residence.

## 1.2 BEGGING

While good places to sleep are defined by criteria such as a heat and safety, the places to spend the day are rather defined by the need for an income. Homeless people have different sources of income, such as unemployment benefits, disability benefits, (occasional) jobs, collecting scrap metal etc... Furthermore, for a number of people begging is still an important survival strategy.

Some homeless only beg occasionally, in order to get some minimal sum that they need for food or cigarettes. For others begging is the main source of income and they also beg for large parts of the day so that it is almost a 24 hour a day job. The money they receive from begging is mainly used for buying drugs or alcohol. Their daily routine is entirely built up around the question of how to get money. In **Norway**, the City Mission project revealed that 95 percent of the interviewed persons needed money to buy illegal drugs. One of the interviewed Norwegian drug users earns his money in different ways. For example, he assists other drug users with their injections. Besides that, he collects bottles and sells things that he finds. The main spots for begging are located in the city centre. These are also the places where it is possible to buy drugs. In **Hungary**, the underpasses are very attractive for people who are homeless, not only because they are a good place for buying drugs, but also because of the serious black market business that is present: goods are on sale, drugs are available, prostitution is present. Homeless people act as a kind of watch-guard by giving a signal when the security guards are arriving. In return, they receive food, beverages, money, drugs and security.

The locations where begging is done vary with time, place, public transport passenger and pedestrian flows. Living from begging involves mastering a set of arguments, practises, attitudes, postures, schedules, places and rules, which demand real skills. To maximize his return, the beggar must evaluate the most profitable locations and times, or the competition and law enforcement he is apt to encounter on a site. The carrying-on of economic activities is associated with certain places that act as working places which homeless people take ownership of through a specific space-time organisation. Some return regularly to the same places, because they have previously begged profitably there, because it is their patch.

In **Slovenia**, we also noted that everybody has his own particular spot for begging. Also Razpotnik and Dekleva (2005) observed that homeless people selling the street journal often sold it at their standard begging location. With begging there is also a protocol involved, which has to be followed.

*‘Every beggar has his own territory for begging and for a newcomer it is hard to get in ... There are rules among them, that all are supposed to follow. These are: when you beg for money, you always say sorry and thank you, even if you don’t get the money. Those that break this rule are excluded, if not in other ways, then physically’ (Street Journal Slovenia, 2005)*

The most popular places to beg in the **Slovenian** capital Ljubljana and Maribor are in front of public buildings (like the court house), near the university faculties or in the most busy streets in the city centre. Besides the advantages, such as the higher concentration of people and the higher possibility of receiving money from passers-by, there are also two important disadvantages related to begging in the most popular places. The first problem is the high concentration of beggars, who have their own territory. Because of this some homeless people avoid these places for begging and find some other spots away from the narrow city centre. The second problem is institutional seeing that begging is prohibited by law. In the past this was punished by imprisonment up to 60 days (Law on offence against public order and peace, 2003). According to the new law, which has been adopted in June 2006, there is a fine for the person found begging or sleeping in public places. The consequences of this law could not yet be observed. A new option in Slovenia is to get money is selling the street journal ‘kings of the street’. Half of the price may be kept by the homeless person selling the journal. Unfortunately, until recently the journal has been only rarely published with only four issues from June 2005 until June 2006.

In **Norway**, beggars spend much of the day within the rectangle that marks the core of the city centre. The main road, especially a particularly busy space around the middle of the street and a space around the west end of the street are used most frequently for begging. Some persons sell the street paper “=Oslo” at the same spot as where they are begging. One of the interviewees has his own spot, which he guards carefully. He is the only one that begs regularly and who has begging as a main source of income. Other interviewees do not beg at all.

In the case of the **Czech Republic**, two of the interviewed persons admit that they sometimes beg. A 46-year old man that has been without accommodation for 16 years always begs in a church on Sundays. The woman who is living in a tent in the allotment garden with her husband went once begging in the Old Town Square. In a whole day, she made only 70 CZK (less than 2.50 €) and she felt very bad while begging. The other interviewed people had never begged in their entire lives. Two men would be too ashamed to go begging and would not do it for the world. Two men make money by collecting scrap metal for recycling.

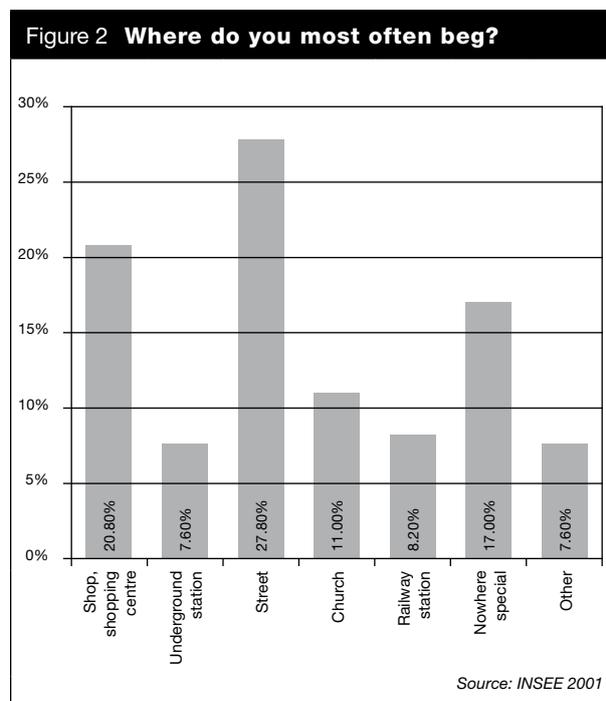
In **Hungary** as well as in other countries, busy urban junctions, such as underpasses, main roads, shopping streets, shopping centres and markets provide numerous possibilities for subsistence. Besides the possibility of begging, there are several regular and occasional jobs to be done. A 32-year old man, who moved from the countryside to Budapest, sleeps in a shed near a market, keeping an eye on the goods.

Not all the people interviewed in **Luxembourg** engage in begging, so all that can be reported is the anecdotal evidence of a few homeless people. One practice is simply to ask passers-by for money. This is mainly done in Avenue de la Gare, which runs between the railway station and upper town where the pedestrian precinct is located. Other begging sites mentioned are the Cathedral square in the upper town, outside supermarkets, and the street where the McDonald's restaurant is situated. Another practice is to go up to people sitting at café tables on the Place d'Armes in the centre of the upper town next to the pedestrian precinct and tourist centre of Luxembourg City.

The best places for begging in **France** are outside food and other shops (pharmacies), cafés, restaurants, banks, post offices, cinemas, churches, phone boxes, underground and RER (Paris-suburbs rapid transit train) station exits. One interviewee (Emmanuel) begs at Alésia underground station on the steps leading down to the platform. He tells me that he earned € 20 in three hours on this spot, compared to an average € 6 for a full day above ground. This enabled him to buy a night's stay in a bed-and-breakfast hotel close to rue d'Alésia. Another homeless person had told him to actually go into the underground station, and rightly:

*"I made € 20 in three hours, compared to before when I only got € 6 in a day". (homeless person interviewed in the Alésia station, France)*

The INSEE survey found that 39.1% of beggars begged almost daily (occasional or regular), mainly outside shops (20.8%), and in the street (27.7%). Only 7.5% beg in underground stations and 8.2% in mainline stations (figure 3). To qualify that, however, the survey was done in urban centres with populations over 20 000, and not just in the capital.



Just over half the beggars questioned by INSEE (54%) received their income from regular givers. It is interesting to note that certain places seem to be more conducive to the presence of regular givers. Beggars outside shops and shopping centres, in underground stations and outside churches more often get money from people they know and see regularly. The street, being a more impersonal place of transit and passage, appears not to enable such familiarity with regular givers to develop. So beggars' presence in certain places may arguably reflect a strategy of customer loyalty development.

### 1.3 EATING

The obvious difficulty of finding shelter or accommodation is compounded for many homeless people by that of finding something to eat. The main food providers for homeless people are the homeless services. They are very widely used by people who are homeless. In addition to this, they buy food for themselves, mainly from the money that they get by begging. The autonomous homeless often have their own improvised kitchen. The people interviewed in the **Czech Republic** for instance, prepare their food on wood burners, made from barrels. They also have a summer furnace laid-dry from white bricks. The interviewed people in the allotment garden area use a wood-heater outside under the trees.

Notwithstanding the fact that in each country there are services that provide food for homeless people, there is still a number of homeless people who are hungry. In the **Czech Republic**, homeless people can come for meals to the day centre on weekdays. During the weekend they have to buy their own food, but if they have no money, they go hungry. One of the interviewed persons admits that he sometimes goes hungry for several days. Another man admitted that he sometimes steals pizza in a garden restaurant (from a plate of a guest who is not at his table at that time). The Emmaüs-BVA survey done in Paris (**France**) confirms that some homeless people have only one meal a day. It reports that finding nourishment is a problem that more particularly affects homeless people aged 18-29 (51%), those who have been rough-sleeping for 5 years and over (51%) and those accommodated in homeless shelters (49%). Slightly fewer of the interviewees living in specialized homeless hostels and social security bed-and-breakfast hotels had gone hungry (30%). In **Luxembourg**, we also asked what homeless people do or did if for some reason they could not use the services available. Some cafés give homeless people the day's leftovers:

*"Some cafés leave stuff on the window-sills, stuff they've got left at the end of the day" (homeless person, Luxembourg)*

Some specialty businesses and shopkeepers do the same. One baker opposite the main railway station always hands out the previous day's croissants when he arrives next morning, while the station buffet sometimes distributes leftover sandwiches at night. A butcher also sometimes gives away fresh sausages or cooked meats. The Bonnevoie priest gives a euro every day to anyone who comes to his door. Also in the Brussels neighbourhood, the Marolles (**Belgium**), traditional shop- and barkeepers consider solidarity with the poor as one of their tasks to perform. All the interviewed traditional shop- and barkeepers gave direct support (food and even money) to homeless people. However, their solidarity is only conditional. Support is clearly reduced, if not refused, to for-

eigners and to homeless who abuse alcohol, to those who reflect otherness in comparison with those who approach the normality. An interviewed person in **Norway** also remarks that contact is very important in order to rely on solidarity actions from shop owners or other costumers.

Looking for food in the dustbins is for a lot of homeless people the last possibility to attain food.

*'Looking for food in the dumpsters... well sometimes also that happens, but mainly I prefer to wait so that I get some money and then I go in the store to buy food.'* (Slovenia, int 3)

One of the interviewed men in the **Czech Republic** also admitted that when he has no food he searches for food in dustbins. One of the other respondents replied with a definite 'no way'. Also one of the Slovenian respondents indicates that he would rather not eat than go looking into the dustbins.

According to one of the homeless informants in **Norway**, 'kind people' sometimes buy food in a sandwich shop. A sale's assistant confirms that it happens that customers buy food for beggars.

To obtain beverage and water seems to be a minor problem. Water can be obtained in the restrooms of shopping centres, in pubs, on a graveyard, in a petrol station and so on. Some of the interviewed people hung mainly around supermarkets and other shops, especially those selling cheap bottled beer.

### 1.4 PERSONAL HYGIENE

As well as housing, food and money, another big concern of homeless people is keeping clean. In addition to being the main food providers, the services for homeless people are also the places most people use for their personal hygiene. Some of the informants in **Norway** state that places like the Salvation Army day centre make it easier to maintain a decent appearance. If these places are unavailable or if people who are homeless have no access to them, they have to improvise. In **Norway** for instance, a woman who was interviewed uses filling station toilets to take care of her personal hygiene. In **Slovenia**, those interviewed replied that the settings used for personal hygiene can either be outdoors (rainwater or river), or in private bars and pubs, public toilets (for which there is a charge) or in specific organisations.

*'Well, I washed in Drava river. In Drava we washed also in some public toilets... later we went to Karitas and started to change our clothes a little.'* (Homeless person, Slovenia)

Private bars are a more difficult option, as the owners or bartenders do not like to let homeless people in. In the **Czech Republic**, the men interviewed in the day centre defecate in toilets in shopping centres (which are free of charge, in contrast with public toilets in the city, the metro or train stations). Sometimes they also go in pubs or urinate outdoors. This very basic form of hygiene care is linked to improvised settings. The people interviewed in the squats wash themselves in their living quarters, bringing water by hand or by means of transport in containers (two of them from a graveyard 1.5 kilometres away, one from a pond). They have bathtubs for baths, which they also use to wash their clothes. One couple even go to a sauna when they have money. In **France**, 67% of the residents interviewed for the Emmaüs-BVA survey said it was important to preserve a good self-image. Similar results were also obtained in **Slovenia**. The total neglecting of hygiene care does not seem to be common among the interviewed persons in Slovenia. But fulfilling daily personal needs and calls of nature is not easy for street people. The BVA survey (**France**) asked homeless people where they go to the toilet. The finding was that 27% use public toilets (coin-operated “Superloos”), 46% go in homeless shelters, and 41% in cafés. Apart from that, there are only off-street recesses and doorways. Paris City Council negotiated with the management company for free access to “Superloos” sited near soup kitchens, as being essential to preserve hygiene, dignity and cleanliness for the poor. This has made 1414 “Superloos” and 24 lavatories accessible free of charge since 1 November 2004. Approximately 95 public parks have toilets in them, which are accessible during park opening hours. There are now free toilets at approximately 130 sites in Paris. There are various places where homeless people can wash themselves. One interviewee (**France**) is able to treat himself to a B&B hotel room when he has had a very good day’s begging. Using a public swimming bath’s washing facilities costs 4 euros. Three interviewees go to the local Turkish baths, swimming baths or NGO-run facilities to wash and keep themselves clean. They also consider them to be much more hygienic than the homeless hostels which, they claim, are infested with lice and crabs.

### 1.5 SOCIALISING

Public places are also gathering points. The main criteria for socialising seem to be, according to the analysed interviews, having a place to sit comfortably and being in a populated area. “Working places” are also the main spots for keeping up connections with passers-by and potential givers. Robert (**France**), for example, believes that his constant presence at Saint Germain en Laye station makes him “part of the landscape” to some extent, so the same people who see him day after day are more inclined to help him. He has several regulars who slip him a few coins every day. An interesting development in the patterns of socialising of the homeless is the introduction of the mobile phones. Mobile phones are quite common among homeless (they use it to contact family or friends), but not all the informants had one. They inform each other on a variety of news (for example what is for dinner in the homeless shelter). In **Slovenia**, parks with benches and the town square in the city centre are the spots where the homeless like to rest, drink together and just hang around. For those staying in the homeless shelter this is often the main place for socialising. Some of the interviewed homeless do not leave it for the majority of the day. In **Luxembourg**, the three-day shelters in Luxembourg City are also focal points for gathering and resourcing. Other meeting places cited in the interviews are Place de Bonnevoie near the “Ulysse” night shelter, the railway station main entrance, Place d’Armes (town centre), Pétrusse Valley and Avenue de la Gare (running between the railway station and the town centre). One person (an illegal immigrant) claimed to have no friends and so no specific place to meet anyone. The others gave no clear and precise answer to this question. The day centres in **Oslo** have become important places for socialising. They are among the few places roofless persons are left in peace with a coffee and have a talk without the risk of being ‘chased away’.

## 2 The railway station: a meltingpot of activities

A special word must be said about railway, underground and bus stations as being places that provide the homeless with opportunities that vary with their different functions. Julien Damon's (1995) study of homeless people's relationship to stations while working with the SNCF's Mission Solidarité (France) is particularly informative. The railway station's history, nature, working hours and urban location make it both a place of hiatus and service provision for users. For many homeless people, the station is a place for resource gathering, but alongside that, the station is also a space for waiting, resting, meeting and living for homeless people. A fair part of the day and night can be spent in the station engaging in a wide range of activities. The high passenger throughput and exchanges make the station a more profitable space than parks, the street, and even the church square. Apart from the income-generating aspect, living in a station allows its services or opportunities to be used as stopgap replacements for life in a private space - eating, showering, storing possessions in left-luggage lockers, social intercourse. As a meeting space, stations allow homeless people to merge with the crowd or stand out in face-to-face encounters. Also, homeless people tend to gather there. It is a place where everyone knows everyone at least by sight and where colleague relationships can be formed. Much more than meetings and endless discussions with colleagues, stations provide opportunities for many interactions with station workers, police, train operators' staff, passengers and other members of the public. But this place is also where homeless people and beggars are least welcome. The life-affecting conflicts that can arise for homeless people will be addressed in the paragraph on conflicts.

# The way that homeless people perceive public space

In this section we try to analyse how people who are homeless perceive the public space and whether they distinguish any place as close to the meaning of home. The meaning of home is multidimensional and it is linked with different elements that are inherent to a home, such as security, family tradition, memories and family relations. (Dupis and Thorns, 1996). There is nothing axiomatic about domestic space, It is a complex, largely idealized construct which can dispense with the interiority of the built structure. It denotes belongingness to a controlled and domesticated place. Domestic space is the space where humans beings settle, the place that makes sense to them, the sanctum with which they enter into a covenant of belonging (Zeneidi-Henry, 2002). For many homeless people, public space is the only place that they can call home. For homeless people, in fact, public space is a specific place in which the private is externalised, and the public internalized, a personal, innermost place. Their presence takes from a public place the possibility of distinguishing between private and public life, personal privacy and visibility. Being in a public place entails total exposure. Homeless people are present in and define themselves as belonging to public space. They are the incarnation of a particular aspect of that space, which defines them as a separate social group. The territories occupied by homeless people in public space may reflect effective personal organisation. Private spaces may be understood as located and organised within a “home” territory which may well be selected by reference to symbolic criteria: it is a place which has emotional significance in the life of the now-homeless person (old neighbourhood, for example). These private places may be shared with other homeless people as a form of self-protection in self-serving strategies or in emotional alliances, or occupied individually, which may require strategies to defend and protect the territory.

Occupying a public place as a private domain is not easily done. There is much anecdotal evidence of the problems encountered in occupying a place, becoming settled, living within the norms. The street and public space in general are fundamental in their life, and private space is restricted for them. But to portray street life as an unfit life is to disregard the fact that homeless people can live on the street with dignity. Street life is not without regulation. Systems of mutual aid and solidarity can be seen, for example, which protect individuals from extreme vulnerability. But this matter of dignity raises the issue of what the concept of “home” means for homeless people. Is it possible to occupy a territory and feel at home in it?

Two kinds of private place can be distinguished. Some are visible, exposed to the public gaze: public bench, cardboard box on the pavement, underground station warm-air outlet. The organisation of space is less elaborate where the shelter is concealed, less exposed to weather hazards and the gaze of others. Concealed private spaces (like squats) more represent an intimate space that the person “owns” with or without a particular spatial organisation. It is safe to say that concealed private space is the space most “owned” by the individual because they feel safe in it: at home. But at the same time, it is also that which most needs defending. It must be borne in mind that street life is not a choice, and that the mere fact of feeling “at home” there and having grown used to a territory or having adapted to the hostile environment of public space does not mean that homeless people cannot aspire to something else.

In **France**, three interviewees were averse to using homeless hostels. Henry singles out Nanterre for his dislike, having used it and found it unhygienic (lice, crabs). They feel they stay cleaner on the street. Squats need to be seen as an aspiration to autonomy and a “home”, a space where self-affirmation is possible without constant reminders of one’s inferior status. As a result, the street and squats or the territory one has occupied may be preferred to shelter provision. There is then no irrationality in the choice: all the constraints imposed there in terms of open hours, hygiene, abstinence, etc., are experienced as condescending, not to say demeaning. Living in a squat also allows one to avoid being treated as someone more debased than others. The Emmaüs-BVA survey findings do not all square with these personal accounts. Contrary to popular myth, homeless people do prefer night shelters to rough sleeping, even if for a short time. 78% of respondents agreed, especially young people (81%), those in work (81%), and those who have been on the streets for less than a year (81%). That notwithstanding, 19% of respondents - especially the over-50s (76%) and those who have been on the streets for 5 years or more - would prefer to wait for longer-term accommodation before coming off the street.

The **Luxembourg** interviewees thought it was not possible to create a private place or sphere anywhere in public space. It must be stressed that while the number of interviews conducted did not enable this issue to be explored further, they did enable two (interlinked) general factors to be identified which structured the interviewees’ perception of public space: the security of places, and the presence of others. That notwithstanding, the presence of family may be a reason for avoiding places. So, a young man from Esch-sur-Alzette - Luxembourg’s second town with a population of only approximately 27 000 - did not want to use the local homeless services for fear of running into a member of his family. There are also secret places, places where drug use and sleeping are possible in relative although not total safety. One group of young people regularly hangs around a derelict industrial site:

*“There are some places you can sleep alright because there’s people using other stuff as well, but there’s always that thought in the back of your mind that if somebody comes, you might have to be off. It’s the sort of thing that keeps people on edge, you’re never completely alright”*  
(homeless person, Luxembourg)

This aptly illustrates the difficulties in creating a private space, even a concealed one; there are no guarantees that it will not be “invaded” by others. Public parks are also a mixed meeting place for homeless people. They are places where rest can be taken during the day, but also the stamping-ground of different marginal groups. Drugs may be hidden there, and being in the wrong place at the wrong time can create problems, not to mention syringes lying around, constituting a danger to those wanting to sit on the grass.

The majority of the interviewed homeless people in **Slovenia** felt that home was lost. It was their previous dwelling, where they used to live with their family. Home is commonly associated with family members with whom they often do not have contact anymore. In their current situation, a feeling of home is mainly linked to safety, friends (among other people who are homeless), knowing the place and frequenting it often. The feeling of safety seemed to be the most important factor. Therefore, many homeless people stated that homeless centres are the closest thing to a home that they currently have. They also cited their territory for begging as a place where they feel at home. This is the place where they socialize with other homeless people and where they feel like a part of the neighbourhood. It seems that certain homeless people feel connected to the neighbourhood. Therefore the meaning of home is linked to the people and the neighbourhood, where they are known. This is well illustrated in the following statement:

*‘Everyone has their spot, their place. A person must be at his working place. If he isn’t, the neighbours come here (in the shelter) and ask for him. He was in the hospital a couple of times and people came to ask where he is, why is he in the hospital, how he is, in which hospital he is so that they would go visit him. When people get up in the morning, the first thing they do is open the window, open the shutters and check if he is there. If he is there, then the day is ok, if not, than something is wrong. He is there all the time, if it is minus 50, he is there. In winter, the neighbours bring him tea, sausages... He has to be there, he is like a clock or a monument. If he is not there then the whole building comes in here crying: ‘where is Ivo, where is Ivo?’”(homeless person, Slovenia)*

In the **Czech Republic**, the three autonomous homeless 'felt good' at their living place. In all three cases the perception of home, of rest and privacy is also stronger because of personal relationships. The homeless people interviewed in the day centre did not feel at home anywhere. They did not have a place of rest; only a man who is sleeping in a wrecked car wreck experiences rest and privacy in his car where nobody bothers him. Still, he feels best in the day centre. When asked about when they feel best and when the worst, their responses vary. The men interviewed in the day centre often feel bad:

*'I often feel bad when I'm replaying the film of my life. I wanted to throw myself off a bridge (int. 1).'*

The young man from the tent felt bad in winter, he feels good when he has money. The woman from the allotment garden felt the best three years ago when, after a winter spent on trams, they discovered this place (an empty cottage where they had a bed and a kitchen unit and could cook food). Otherwise she always feels insecure, the worst part was when their cottage was torn down, and she really went to pieces. On the other hand, the woman from the brick building often feels good and cannot remember ever feeling the worst.

In **Hungary**, the most important factors that are considered when choosing a location are similar to other countries: safety, survival and subsistence, proximity of relevant offices, proximity of former residence, proximity of or distance from other homeless. A possible strategy to create a secure place to sleep is to hide far from everyone else. Although security is not the only reason for hiding; shame is an important hiding strategy as well. Homeless people are sometimes ashamed to such a degree that they hide in the most deserted, run-down areas. They usually do not like to transform their surroundings and make no attempt to clean or maintain the place:

*'Leave me alone, I'm not going anywhere, I want to die here...'* (63-year-old man, Hungary, staying under the pillar of a bridge on the edge of town, unseen by all, sick)

Autonomous homeless people try to enhance the security of their homes with the help of fences, by keeping dogs and by living in larger groups.

In **Norway**, two vital issues concerning the feeling of home must be highlighted: routines versus break ups; and the need of safety versus invisibility. The first issue relates to living and organising the day and night by routine, versus constant break ups and the urge to move around. The second topic relates to the fact that being surrounded by people gives a feeling of protection. But those interviewed also expressed in different ways that they should not be too visible in public spaces. One respondent also highlighted the fact that he sometimes has an urgent need to be alone. Once, he locked himself into a public toilet and stayed there the whole day.

# Conflicts in the use of public space

The urban public space is one of the battlegrounds, where the interests, intentions and norms of passers-by and residents clash with those of people who are homeless, for whom public space is inevitably their private space as well. In this section we will analyse the conflicts that homeless people experience in their use of public space. We must keep in mind that for homeless people, these conflicts in open spaces and public places appear only at the end of a long and painful series of conflicts, which have taken place in private space, in the home, in the family. So those who have been expelled, thrown out of their homes, either by others or fleeing themselves from unbearable conflicts, are the ones who, when they arrive at that 'nothing-place' which is a park, a bench, an underground station or the entrance to a supermarket, find that they have to leave there too because they are not wanted. What they previously thought of as an obvious right (the street belongs to everyone, doesn't it?) has become a source of difficulties (I can't even stay out in the open). The significant development towards an increase in quasi-public spaces has important implications for homeless people. Many places (such as stores, public transport) have been taken over and managed by privately-owned companies. The right to stay there turns out to be particularly problematic. The first part of this section will therefore deal with the control of public space by the security services. Furthermore, we will deal with NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) reactions in some neighbourhoods; the adaptation of the urban furniture in order to control the presence of homeless people in public space, the psychological control of public space and the control of public space by other homeless people or other users. Unfortunately, conflicts in public space are not restricted to these different ways of managing public place. In some countries, some serious criminal incidents are reported.

## 1 The control of public space

### 1.1 THE CONTROL OF PUBLIC SPACE BY SECURITY SERVICES (THE POLICE AND PRIVATE SERVICES)

In all countries, homeless people are confronted with conflicts with security services. The presence of private security guards is not equal in every country. Furthermore there is a difference between the conflicts with policemen and the conflicts with private guards.

In the Brussels neighbourhood, the Marolles (**Belgium**), the limited and small-scale gentrification of the neighbourhood, both commercial and residential, explains the absence of very visible security guards in the neighbourhood. Conversely, the presence of security guards is extremely visible in the South station (which is only 300 metres away). "B-security" is the internal surveillance service of the Belgian railway company, founded in 1999 and currently staffed with 160 police. Besides, other police services such as Group 4 watch the station. The task of these police is almost literally to clean the railway station, to remove potentially and effectively disturbing otherness, in order to avoid disturbing or injuring the interests of commuters, businessmen and traders by the presence of deviating behaviour and feelings of insecurity. This also explains why homeless people are mostly to be found in the periphery of the South Station, at minor entrances, out of the commercial activity range of the traders in the station. This removal by the private security services occurs often with violence:

*'At the South Station, we often experience violence... the guards of Groupe 4, they hit homeless people, not with their truncheons, but with their pocket torches. We now have meetings with the NMBS, and other services... to resolve these problems. But the only group who doesn't come is groupe 4... They don't want to recognize the truth...' (Belgian, used to be homeless for 15 years)*

Callous interventions of security guards in the South Station have led to the recently founded 'collectif du Midi', a broad collaboration between grassroots organisations, charitable institutions, services for the homeless and homeless people themselves. Their aim is to counteract the oppressive dimension of current security measures against homeless people in the South Station. However, it is still too early to estimate the general impact of this initiative, this collaboration recently succeeded in negotiating with those parties responsible for the treatment of the homeless and to adjust their dominant security discourse with inclusion of some elements of solidarity.

In **Slovenia**, the large majority of the homeless people interviewed reported little or no conflict with the police in external public spaces. Some even reported that the relations with the police have improved and that they had more conflicts in the past. If they had problems with the police, it was mainly because they were begging, they were making too much noise or if they were in too large a group. Even in those cases, the police tried to avoid having conflicts with homeless people. They just ask them to go away, which results in the removal of their presence to other police domains. It even seems that homeless people who spent a long time in a certain neighbourhood and became in a certain way part of it, have fewer problems with the police. They know them personally and they are more frequently left alone:

*'They know me well here, so they let me be... they know me so well, that they gave up on me (on trying to make him leave his place in front of the cinema)' (Slovenia, int. 8)*

Homeless people with a less permanent location seem to have more problems. Two of the homeless people interviewed reported being beaten by the police when they were found sleeping in an external public place. Others mainly reported that their documents were checked. More problematic are the quasi-public spaces, such as bars, stores, shopping malls. There the homeless are an undesirable presence and most often the police or security guards are called to remove them from the territory. In some cases, this removal was accompanied with violence:

*'They lock the train station ... noon comes, and they open at 5 am;.. but I went down, into the toilet... I closed myself into the cabin... some went into other cabins... some slept on the floor. And than they came and beat us... the security guard... I was all beaten up...' (Slovenia, int3).*

In the case of **Hungary** a threefold division in the control of public space by security guards can be observed: the metro, the underpass and the street. The strictest rules apply at the lowest level, in the metro. This area belongs to the Budapest Public Transportation Company (BVK) and is publicly used privatised space (quasi public space). The Metro Security Service (metro police) oversees order and its duties include the exclusion and removal of unwanted people, as laid out in the terms of use of the metro:

*'Persons disturbing other passengers because of intoxication or dirty clothing can be excluded from using the metro.'*

This rule, formulated by the metro police, gives them the right to remove homeless people (with dirty clothes or intoxicated) from the metro whether or not they have a valid ticket or pass. A subjective judgement about someone's appearance is sufficient to take action and 'clean up' the metro by removing unwanted visitors. The next level is the underpass. Observation, control and physical cleaning actions have resulted in the exclusion of certain groups from the underpass. This resulted in an almost complete expulsion of homeless people, though not quite as effectively as from the metro station itself. The policy of the local council outlines the following aim:

*'We will take back public areas, so that the residents of Budapest, tourists, old and young, families can use these areas to meet and relax. At the same time, the former users of the areas are offered alternatives suited to their needs: shelters and social services.'* (Local council, Budapest)

The alternation of the users implies the spatial exclusion and segregation of homeless people from other citizens. At the uppermost level, in the streets, exclusion and segregation attempts are not so coordinated. Several homeless removed from the underpass take shelter in the vicinity of Kalvin Square, on benches and other sheltered spots.

*'We are only sent away from the underpass, nobody cares what we do out here. We can do anything outside, the police and public space patrols do not care. Why? Because that are the orders they got. When it is raining we can stay underground, but when it stops we must leave.'* (homeless person, Hungary)

This strict division between metro-underpass and the street is not the same for every homeless person. When the police got to know you, they sometimes leave you alone. Two of the interviewed persons, for instance, buy the metro security guards something to drink now and then, with the aim of being left alone in the metro.

Also in **Spain**, at the beginning of this millennium, public space has become a problematic, difficult and conflictive place resulting in a more severe approach. In Barcelona for instance, the local Catalan government has put into effect some municipal ordinances forbidding prostitution, aggressive begging and bad citizenship. At the same time, in the historic area of Madrid's night-life, there are districts imploring more policemen to control urban gangs. Because of the deterioration of some commercial areas of the city centre, some councilmen asked that the police would be given 'a legal instrument that would allow them to temporarily move to shelters (even against their will) those beggars, prostitutes and drug addicts who have taken up living in public areas which are thus degraded and have stigmatized the environment (El País, 1st July 2006).'

What appears to be an open, free space has its hidden rules, which can apparently be easily broken, almost without knowing it. Homeless people are subjected to a kind of institutionalised violence by the police force: gestures which are apparently innocuous but which touch the limits of legality (for example asking people who are homeless for their identity papers over and over again as a kind of pressure to make the person leave). Good behaviour, clean clothes and a conventional use of public space seems to be the code, which homeless people have to follow:

*'Since I was sleeping on a bench in the park there, in my district, well they called me (because they probably thought I was drunk or drugged or something) and I woke up and said "yeah?" "What are you doing here?" and I said, "well nothing, resting a bit." And of course I lied because they said: "Where do you live?" and I said: "Well, right near here, I said that I was waiting for my dad or some fib like that. Because I couldn't tell them anything else, of course, they saw I wasn't drunk or drugged or nothing. I was dressed OK. I always try, being out in the street and all, to dress as well as I can. You can see." '* (Antonio, Spain)

None of the interviewees told us of any case of police brutality, but the beatings by security guards do not appear to be isolated cases. One of our interviewees had worked in the past as a private security guard and can now see, from the other side, what his previous behaviour had been like:

*'I know people that have had problems with security guards and the like. For instance, for not having any money and jumping the gate to the underground, people do that, and the guards catch him and instead of throwing him out, well they throw him out and hit him on the side of the head a couple of times.'* (Homeless person, Spain, former security guard)

Also in **Norway** the homeless people interviewed noted that when it comes to chasing people away, the private guards are the worst. The private guards are more aggressive, especially towards drug addicts. In Norway the visibility drug users seems to be a theme of conflict. A group of veteran users of opiates had for some years settled in an open space named Plata near Oslo central railway station. The group, which had a core of older and exhausted drug addicts, was quite visible in the landscape. During spring 2004 a debate developed around the harm the group might be causing. The debate was fronted by the head of the Oslo Police Force and by politicians in the City Council. In early June 2004 the group at Plata was physically removed by the police force. The group settled just two blocs from Plata in a rather busy street. According to the security guards of Oslo S they observe very few homeless or drug users in and near the hall after the action against Plata. If the guards discover people who sleep at the station area, they are instructed to expel the person. Homeless persons are however 'allowed' to use the luggage boxes for travellers. Some of these boxes are unlocked. According to the interviewed guard, they allow people who they believe are homeless to keep their things in the boxes (and leave the boxes open). This practice seems to be on the borders of the occupational instructions of the security company. But although it might not be in accordance with the instructions to let people keep their things in unlocked boxes for days and weeks, it seems to be silently accepted by the guards. Two of the interviewed persons say that they frequently keep their things in luggage boxes. One of the interviewees told us that she once had three boxes when the guards asked her to remove her things.

In the case of the **Czech Republic**, the results of the Prague 5 District research illustrate the restrictive approach of public administration to the issue of homelessness. The municipal authorities of Prague 5 hired a security agency to guard the pedestrian zone around the Zlatý Andel shopping centre. Three security guards guarded the area of Andel non-stop from about the end of November until Christmas Eve. Nevertheless, this strategy did not seem to work. Right from the moment the security guards left, alcoholics, homeless people and street vendors have been back at Andel. The mayor is now considering the possibility of hiring the security agency all-year round. When asking about possible conflicts with security services, the interviewees' responses were negative at first then rather evasive. All respondents take good care of their appearance and were aware of the importance of their behaviour and clothing in order to avoid conflicts. Only one man remembers having a while ago a conflict with a security worker at a shopping centre. He did not explain the cause of the conflict.

The **Luxembourg** police seem to be relatively tolerant of homeless people, and the odd problem that has arisen appears to be to do with the attitude of individual officers. Part of the reason for this is the context of Luxembourg, which cannot be compared with big cities like Paris. But also, the closing-down of the squats in 2003 on safety grounds without doubt contributed to getting the situation in Luxembourg City under control. The opening of a night shelter for drug addicts near Luxembourg's main railway station and more recently, a "dope room" in the same building, as well as the opening of a night shelter and homeless services in Luxembourg's second town as part of a process of decentralization have helped defuse the situation:

*"The cops don't bother if you do nothing and keep quiet, they leave you alone (...) except for on the national monuments". (homeless person, Luxembourg)*

When the police and private security guards do move in is if a recognizably homeless person sits for too long on the base of a national monument. Homeless people have more problems with private security guards than the police in Luxembourg.

There has been a renewed crackdown on beggars in **France** since the mid-1990s. Their presence in some towns is seen as a public nuisance, threatening the image of tourist towns in summer, and sowing fear and insecurity among the public. Summer 1995 saw a resurgence of public debates on begging. From 1993, some mayors had brought in anti-begging ordinances, almost always limited to the summer season and specific parts of towns. In May 1995, La Rochelle town council, for example, put up notices in the town streets reading: *"Don't encourage begging. It can lead to drunkenness and aggressive behaviour on the public highway"*. On 4 July 1995, the mayor signed an Order outlawing *"unauthorised importuning"* and prohibited *"any person or animal from remaining for a prolonged time in one position, in particular lying down, thereby obstructing the free passage of pedestrians."* The Order was held to be illegal by the prefect (senior government officer) for Charente-Maritime. The legality of these and similar regulations in other cities was widely debated in connection with the reform of the French Penal Code in March 1994, when begging and vagrancy ceased to be criminal offences. But as the testimony below dating from 24 June 2004, shows, homeless people in Bordeaux are still being persecuted:

*"If you stay on the pavement, they'll stop and search you, tell you to move on, down to the banks of the Garonne between the Pierre and Saint-Jean bridges where it's really grotty. Because Bordeaux's a tourist town. So they "clean it up" in June, same as every year. From 15 May to 15 September, they're constantly on our case so it can look nice for tourists". (homeless person, France)*

So begging is still prohibited in trains, stations and any railway building, even though vagrancy and begging ceased to be a crime in the Penal Code in March 1994. Even though it is prohibited, begging still goes on in public transport where the practical impossibility of enforcing these laws can be seen. Business (the company's image with its customers) and security (addressing users' feeling of insecurity) considerations dictate the transport operators' policy of trying to manage the presence of homeless people and its consequences. The SNCF's main aim was to clear homeless people from its stations so as to provide its customers with safe, clean, untroubled environment. Hence the crackdown on homeless people in stations. But the action taken varies with the group concerned: the reactions of security patrol to organised begging (Romanian networks) are different to those towards down-and-outs. But even violent clear-outs do not work. Sooner or later, the homeless evictees will return to their spot.

*“They told me, ‘you, push off out of it’, so I went. But I went back this morning anyway, because you still earn more there than on the street” (homeless beggar who works the Alésia underground station).*

But along with enforcement activities, transport operators also try to manage the homeless population issue in more or less welfare-oriented ways. Since 1977, the Paris city transport authority’s homeless help team (BAPSA RATP) has been doing the rounds of stations, picking homeless people up and transporting them to the Nanterre homeless shelter (CHAPSA) for the night. In 1994, the decriminalization of vagrancy and begging led to the BAPSA being reorganized and renamed “recueil social” (social assistance team), backed up in 1996 by another scheme - RATP Assistance - which takes homeless people to emergency homeless services provision.

## 1.2 THE CONTROL OF PUBLIC SPACE BY SOCIETY

### a) *The neighbourhood (NIMBY-reactions)*

In the former section, we saw how homeless people can become a part of the neighbourhood and can rely on solidarity acts from ‘their neighbours’. A few stories show last wisps of personal dignity in the form of good relationships with people who are homeless. In all countries, some elements of solidarity between homeless people and the ‘their neighbourhood’ could be found. In Spain, the interviewees generally speak positively about their relationship with the neighbours. For the most part, all the interviewees had received help or support. This help from private benefactors leads to closer relationships when the time in the street is prolonged and ends in a relationship of a mutual exchange of small favours which reinforces and consolidates life in the streets:

*‘I’m in the street.. some 14 years. (...) Where I slept, there was like a door to a storeroom, in a restaurant, there was a space, well I slept there. In the morning the owner brought me coffee, breakfast. He let me sleep there. I spent three or four years sleeping there. Imagine the trust, when they didn’t have change, they gave me 50, 100 euro notes, “here, go get change.” Sometimes I take a while because I can’t find any. I leave my stuff there, put my knapsack in the shop and go and look for change.’ (Abdul, Moroccan homeless, Spain)*

Unfortunately, also the opposite reaction takes place. In certain neighbourhoods some clear NIMBY-reactions against the presence of homeless people or the presence of a shelter occur. We shall deal with examples from France, Spain and the Czech Republic.

People living in the vicinity of homeless hostels and shelters in **France** frequently complain about the nuisances caused locally by users, who are sometimes castigated as posing a threat to public order and health. These nuisances perceived by local residents are frequently instrumental in active displays of rejection of homeless people: claims of brawling and aggressive behaviour by hostel users, noise (shouting and screaming), being smelly and dirty, filth in the street (bottles, excrement and vomit, papers and refuse). Local residents describe these as personal injuries, and their feelings about homeless people feed the fears and concerns about the safety of their families and themselves. Beyond that, there are also fears about the quality of the environment and quality of life (effect on shops, and perceived threat to property values; the physical appearance and antisocial behaviour of users wandering about the streets, urinating in public or engaging in aggressive begging). The conflicts that erupt in these communities centre on fear and neighbourhood decline. Some residents form groups, get up petitions that they submit to politicians, and may take active steps against the presence of hostels to preserve their quiet neighbourhood and quality of life. In some areas, meetings are held, attended by local residents and all the individuals and government bodies concerned by the problem.

In the **Czech Republic**, the social service providers operating in Prague have been pressing for the establishment of a winter night shelter for homeless people who sleep rough. They have the support of the capital’s municipal administration, but the efforts are hindered by the fact that the City of Prague is divided into 22 districts, each with their own local authority administering the territory. Without the approval of these district authorities, the City of Prague authority cannot establish a winter emergency shelter anywhere in the city.

This was clearly demonstrated in winter 2004-2005 when, in succession, four remote areas were chosen for a temporary winter shelter, but all four district authorities refused the plans. In winter 2005-2006 a temporary winter shelter was set up in rented premises of an empty, privately owned building, but after a short time a populist campaign had set off using xenophobic attitudes and the night shelter was closed. A similar situation (this has not changed since June 2006<sup>2</sup>) surrounds the establishment of a new day centre to replace the one in the vicinity of the Central Station where the rental contract was terminated by the new private owner. The usual argument in objecting to social services for homeless people is describing the location as a residential area.

Also in **Spain**, fear and distrust also provoke problems with the neighbours:

*'People like us, in the street, they don't want us, that's the truth. For example, once, he doesn't remember because he was drunk, when they brought him here (the Samu). It was because a lady complained and they called the health services: "with so much space, why don't you go away? I don't want you under my windows." We were sleeping near them, near her windows, and she wanted to water.'* (homeless person, Spain)

#### **b) Public opinion**

There is also a more subtle kind of violence that does not require blows, or even words to break the resistance and the morale of the homeless. Sometimes the greatest violence is in a tiny, everyday, almost intangible gesture, something simple as a glance, which nevertheless can unchain an enormous amount of destruction in the person that receives it and feels it as a judgement, an unjust sentence that cannot be appealed. In **Hungary** Studio Metropolitana and Double Decker regularly conduct telephone surveys in Budapest (under the authority of the Local Council) in order to collect information on the opinions of the citizens on important issues affecting life in the capital. In a survey that covered homelessness, data was collected using standardised questionnaires, by trained interviewers, using the method of telephone interviews. The representative sample included 300 respondents over 18 years of age, living in Budapest.

Two thirds of the respondents acknowledge that homeless people have the right to use public space. However, many do not welcome them in the inner city (30%), or in public transport (20%). Almost half of them argue that homeless people should be evicted from underpasses. On the other hand 20 % think they should be allowed to sleep in the metro stations in winter. Two thirds, mostly women and the elderly concerned about their own safety, believe that people who are homeless should be removed from the streets and forced to use social services facilities and shelters. Nearly half of the respondents replied that they buy some of the magazines written and sold by people who are homeless. The majority never or only sometimes take the magazine in return for the donation. The majority of those who accept the paper only take a glance; only one third reads it thoroughly. The respondents seem to have a certain selection mechanism when giving an individual support. Politeness and a nice personality are the most significant, followed by the criteria that they should not appear to be alcoholic. Some people prefer to help the most ragged, run-down homeless. On the contrary, others choose those that look decent despite being homeless. Alternatively, some donors are moved both by the most miserable-looking and the less unfortunate homeless. 60% prefer to be addressed and are more open to donate if they are on foot. Many are reluctant if asked in the metro, bus stop or in their car; the reason being that in such situation they might feel frustrated, cornered and forced, without the possibility to refuse or escape, or at least make a free decision. Half of the respondents prefer to support the elderly, whereas beggars with children and dogs are not attractive.

In the Brussels neighbourhood, the Marolles (**Belgium**), we interviewed young people who are driving the gentrification of the area, chiefly higher-educated single households or couples without children who recently discovered the neighbourhood. They like the multicultural atmosphere of the neighbourhood and they see it as part of the deal that some inconveniences may occur due to the fact that they live in a former deprived neighbourhood. In contrast with the requests of removal of homeless people in the Hungarian capital by the respondents of the telephone test, this group tolerates the presence of the old inhabitants of the neighbourhood. Not one of those interviewed associated otherness with a need for more repression. They perceive their neighbourhood as places of 'we' and places of 'them'. Nevertheless, this tolerance did not end in more solidarity with the poor and homeless people of the neighbourhood. The main answer was that helping homeless people is a task of the State.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of completion of this report in October 2006.

1.3 THE CONTROL OF PUBLIC SPACE  
BY THE OTHER HOMELESS PEOPLE

Conflicts among the homeless people interviewed vary from country to country. It seems that respecting the territorial boundaries is a prerequisite for the absence of conflict. Therefore, a higher number of homeless people may imply an increase in the number of conflicts.

In **Slovenia** there does not seem to be a lot of conflict among homeless people. They are often very connected and have close friendships. Principally they respect each other begging-places. In **Hungary**, those interviewed told us about the difficulty of protecting your belongings in the shelters. One respondent informed us that all his belongings were stolen once while he was sleeping. For him, every homeless person is an enemy. In **Luxembourg**, fights break out in the station when homeless people steal one another's beer, for example:

*“When some homeless people see you've got more than them, they can give you aggro if you don't give them a fag or a euro” (homeless person, Luxembourg)*

2 The infrastructural control of public space

Besides the direct control of public space by security services, neighbours or other users of public space, some small interventions can be sufficient to affect and control the way of living of people who are homeless. An enormous effort in design, aimed at driving away undesirables, can be seen in architecture, urban furniture or sign-posting. Anti-homeless benches, gates and fences, apparently innocent decorative elements, which nevertheless stop anyone from sitting under a roof or glass canopy, are spreading all over the cities. The shopping area around Oslo City (**Norway**) and the railway station has expanded during the last six-seven years. The interior of the station is growing into a shopping mall. Besides the privatisation of the interior public spaces by the expansion of the shopping and restaurant area, the waiting hall has transformed into a hostile environment for homeless people. There are no benches suited for lying downs, the chairs are separated by armrests. At the nearby bus station, there are some resting places shaped in elegant, but unpleasant stone material. In **France**, Gilles Paté (1995) has shown how “hygienic benches, real ‘beds of nails’” are carefully designed so as not to be laid down on, but just briefly rested against. RATP designers, shop-front decorators, and managers of some blocks of flats manage human bodies like flows to be controlled, and the homeless people that park themselves in “their” space as undesirable elements.

Figure 3 The “beds of nails”



In some cases, adapting the interior of urban spaces is not sufficient to control them. For example, it is prohibited to stay or spend the night in Luxembourg City's main railway station. To discourage people from doing so, the benches were taken out, leaving only a waiting room. This has radically changed the station's practical value for homeless people.

Recently, the local council of the 7th district of Budapest (**Hungary**) ordered the installation of armrests on benches in public areas, so as to prevent them from being used for lying and sleeping. For the homeless, this implies an adaptation of their living and sleeping habits. The public opinion about this intervention is rather divided. One third of the respondents (of the telephone test, performed by Studio Metropolitana and Double Decker) agree with the decision, they welcome that the benches are back to their intended use, for sitting on. Many argue that the homeless should sleep in shelters, not in the streets. Others find it visually disturbing that the homeless are around and have fear of catching diseases and are concerned about the unpleasant smell. The majority of the respondents, however, do not agree with the alteration of the benches. They argue that everyone has the right to sit or lie down wherever they want in public areas. Some add that sleeping in the benches was at least some kind of solution compared to the present consequence of sleeping on the ground.

### 3 Serious crime against homeless people

The most obvious form of permanent conflict suffered by rough sleepers is that seen in episodes of physical violence in which they are often involved, be it a robbery, a mugging or a fight. Besides, female respondents experience a constant fear of being attacked sexually:

– *Have you ever been attacked?*

– *Yeah, it was in the park... I was raped. It was by the Marina (a centre for the homeless), when I came out of the Marina, it was a time when I was taking tranquilizers because I was quitting drugs. To stop the drugs, they gave me tranquilizers... It was someone in the street and he raped me...'* (Jacinta, Spain).

A female respondent from **Norway** sleeps with an iron bar by her side and she acts like she is mad to scare people away.

In three countries, **the Czech Republic, Spain and Slovenia**, several serious attacks (attempted murders and murders) of homeless people by youngsters are also noted. It seems that they attack homeless people as a means of passing their time. In 2003, the **Slovenian** public was shocked by a brutal and sadistic murder of a homeless person in a small town Sostanj. Four young people and one adult were suspected and later on also convicted. In **the Czech Republic** at the beginning of 2006, criminologists were surprised by the pastime of a group of youngsters who would, in superior numbers attack homeless people and boys who could not defend themselves. They recorded their attacks and posted the recordings on the internet. The internet records were eventually instrumental in the successful arrest of the group that calls itself Plameňák (*"Flamingo"* - the word also implies *"flames"* in Czech). One shot of approximately 2 minutes called "Mosquito vs. Tramp" shows these youngsters attacking in sequence several men who can be considered (also due to the title) homeless. At the beginning one of them is seen beating a bearded man, presumably homeless, in a passageway, first punching him in the head, slamming his head against the wall and finally kicking him in the legs, stomach and crotch. When the attacked man starts to defend himself successfully, two other youths rush in, chasing the man away.

Cut to a new scene: The same youngster approaches a man sitting on a bench in a town square (it is not possible to recognize whether it is a homeless man) and suddenly kicks him in the head. The man is immediately surrounded by three other youths. Another cut: Two young men are rushing across the street towards a bearded man, presumably the one from the first scene, when they get close to him they are joined in the shot by two others and another man, perhaps a companion of the attacked. One youngster punches the bearded man in the face, he defends himself, but the other youngsters attack him in superior number; the man is running away, falls on the pavement, the youngsters kick him repeatedly and then leave. Last cut: Pursuit of the bearded man, the beating and kicking continues on a cobble-stone street as the man is pushed over, one youngster sits on the lying man, punching him in the face. Pedestrians and cars pass by and no one intervenes. The entire video is accompanied by music with acoustic accentuation of the punches and kicks.

In May 2005, two other homeless men were set on fire at two places in Prague, on two subsequent days. During the first attack, someone poured petrol early in the morning over a homeless man sleeping on a bench in a forest park in the city outskirts. A 22-year old man with five previous convictions is arrested, but he denies any involvement in the crime. The second incident happened on a tram. A 43-year-old homeless man, Mr. V., was set on fire in a tramcar arriving at the terminal station at Divoká Šárka. The tram driver put the fire out with a dry powder extinguisher.

In March 2006, three young men were found guilty of murder by the Opava District Court and sentenced, respectively to 13 and 12 years in prison. The youths first spent some time drinking wine at the station, then they discovered that there were two homeless men nearby. They picked up some heavy concrete slabs and armed themselves with a wooden pole. Then they attacked the homeless men who were also drunk, with force. They threw the prepared slabs at them, kicked them and finally used the wooden pole to hit their victims over their heads and necks. According to the court's verdict, the youngsters actually jumped on the men's heads with both feet together and, for extra entertainment, waved their arms as if they were angels taking the souls of the dead to heaven. The youths then left the beaten homeless men lying there and left. The 37-year-old homeless, sustained serious head injuries and died as a result. The 48-year-old man was transported to the hospital and his life was saved by the doctors.

In the morning of 12 April 2006 in the former exhibition area in Pilsen (Czech Republic), two dead bodies of homeless men (age 44 and 49) were found, together with a third man who was injured. The bodies of the victims were lying behind a metal fence close to a river where homeless people spent the winter in shacks. That was also where the murderer attacked them. Based on the character of injuries it is assumed that they were beaten to death with a hard object. The police investigate the case as a double murder and an attempted murder. This murder could be related to a case from two years ago when a homeless man was brutally beaten up in the same area and needed several weeks of treatment. The attacker was never found.

Also in **Spain**, there was last year a savage attack that had enormous repercussions in the media. In Barcelona, three young boys, one of them almost an adolescent, beat a woman who was sleeping in the entrance to a bank where there was a cash machine. In the end they set her on fire using a flammable liquid they stole from a work site nearby. The woman, María del Rosario Endrinal, died as a result of her burns. Unlike other occasions when the persons attacked or killed in the street received only a brief mention in the press and the crimes committed were finally forgotten or remained unpunished, in this case the security cameras at the bank captured the scene. Because of this, public opinion could see the horrible spectacle of uncalled-for, savage violence, which, almost like a game, ended the life of this woman. During an interview, performed two years ago, we heard a similar case from a homeless person in Madrid:

- ‘– *Those skinheads... they've already sent me to the hospital a couple of times. They broke my rib. I got hit here on the head, here, on the left. You know this is the cerebellum. And they hit me with a bat... a baseball bat... and part of my brain is... paralyzed. That was ... at least a year and a half ago more or less.*
- *(...) Another night they set my sponge mattress on fire... (..)*
- *That stuff about skinheads is common, isn't it...*
- *When they catch you... on weekends, they're dangerous...*
- *Weekends?*
- *Yeah, during the week...nothing.. but...they already beat me up a couple of times.’ (homeless man, Spain)*

# Policy lessons and conclusions

In this report of the European Observatory on Homelessness on profiling homelessness, we focused on the relation between public space and people who are homeless. Three central questions were treated: which public spaces do homeless people use intended for which activities? what are homeless people's perceptions of public space? and do they experience conflict in the use of public space?

Fieldwork has been executed in eight European countries (the Czech Republic, France, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, Hungary, Norway and Belgium). In total, we performed 52 in-depth interviews with people who are homeless. Besides, we also included results from each country relevant existing research. In addition, observation, executed during the fieldwork, could be integrated in the analysis.

In order to profile the homeless people, we could only rely on the profiles of the 64 interviewed persons and on some quantitative data obtained from the other pieces of research. Although we focussed on men as well as women, it turned out to be more difficult to interview women who are roofless. The same conclusion can be made for young persons. We could only interview 2 persons younger than 25 years. Norwegian employees from outreach services state that young people more often spend the night or day with friends or acquaintances than going to the social services. On the contrary, the Czech winter emergency project exposes that a disturbingly high percentage of young people have spent the night in one of the shelters. During the interviews, not many indications were found about the increase or decrease of foreigners among the homeless population.

In order to analyse the use of public space, the homeless people's perception of public space and the conflicts in public space, a hypothesis was drafted, based on the experience of street workers and workers from walk-in services, that more autonomous homeless people have different understandings of public space and practices in public space than drifting homeless people. The autonomous homeless people try to transform the public space to some kind of home and they often form relationships with the local residents.

Drifting homeless people have no permanent place; they sometimes sleep on the bare pavement. As indicated in the paper, those interviewed belong somewhere in the continuum between these two extreme points. Nevertheless, some general conclusions and policy lessons for both groups can be drawn.

In the first place, we notice a lack of places where homeless people could take care of their personal hygiene. They often have to resort to very basic and improvised hygiene strategies. Natural sources such as rivers, or the use of public toilets or toilets in bars or restaurants, are not preferred solutions, but are a necessity. Therefore, the improvement in the number of services would allow people who are homeless to wash, shave and take a shower more easily.

Secondly, the interviews offered an insight into the most important factors concerning the feeling of home. Safety, the proximity of others, the distance from possible enemies and invisibility seem to be the most important factors. The busy city centre and public transport are for many homeless people the places for hanging around where they feel most comfortable and at home. This means that shelters should not be too far from these most populated, busy areas. Yet, there is a trend in some countries towards a decentralisation of these shelters and towards a move to the ghettos and suburbs. Being part of a vibrant urban life and of a particular neighbourhood seems to be very valuable for people who are homeless. Unfortunately, these areas are also the places that other users of public space indicate as places 'they would rather not have any homeless persons' (the telephone test in Hungary revealed that 30 % of the respondents did not welcome homeless people in the inner city, 20 % did not appreciate the presence of homeless people in public transport and almost half of the respondents argue that homeless people should be expelled from underpasses).

Thirdly, there are obvious efforts to solve the problems with homeless people (and not the problems of homeless people) through persecution, repression, agitation and harassment. Especially local politicians (in the large cities) try to force people who are homeless out of their territory to neighbouring areas, from the city centre to the outskirts, from the outskirts to the centre or beyond the city limits. This leads to a growing social exclusion and segregation of homeless people from other citizens. Also the trend towards a criminalization of people who are homeless through the implementation of stricter rules on begging (for example in Slovenia) makes the paths of homeless people more and more complex. Ultimately, this buck-passing is orchestrated by the central and local authorities. Decentralization splits public policy responsibilities - especially housing policies - between the national and local levels. Improved cooperation between the different policy levels and security services is necessary.

Finally, we notice a narrowing of the sleeping options of people who are homeless in public space. Due to trends such as monitoring, surveillance of public spaces and the increasing privatisation of public space, the possibilities of finding a place to sleep in places such as railway stations or metros have decreased noticeably. Also other trends in neighbourhoods such as gating, surveillance, locking the entrance of residential buildings or the adaptation or even complete abolition of urban furniture restrict the sleeping options of the homeless.

Therefore political actors should note that due to these trends, conflicts in public space might increase and that other options for people who are homeless will be necessary. Besides, without access to any sources of heat, the health risks of homeless people will also increase. This might indicate a growing need for accommodation (not only services for sleeping but perhaps also the availability of places for their daily needs), even without the increase of the homeless population. Yet, the establishment of shelters does not seem to occur without any problems. The strategy of NIMBY-reactions, resulting from fear and distrust, tend to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy as it feeds and reinforces the danger for those who are trying to protect themselves, since the segregation and forced distancing from others makes living together more and more difficult for everyone. The overall impression is that there are very few places where homeless people can settle down. Many of those interviewed emphasised that one has to behave well in order to be allowed to stay in certain public places, although it is not always enough to behave well. Roofless people may also be chased away because they are in the wrong place, despite their behaviour. Therefore, an urban strategy that is the opposite of what is now happening is essential: one that nourishes the opportunities for mixing and interchanging, through the multiplication and the creation of public spaces which are open and hospitable, to which all kinds of people would come willingly and would have no problem in sharing (Bauman, 2006).

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