



# **Poverty and Homelessness in Athens: Governance and the Rise of an Emergency Model of Social Crisis Management**

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# Poverty and Homelessness in Athens: Governance and the Rise of an Emergency Model of Social Crisis Management

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper presents findings from the study “Caring for the homeless and the poor in Greece: implications for the future of social protection and social inclusion”. First, we offer an overview on the types of existing provisions for the homeless and the poor in Athens. Second, a wider concern of this paper is to discuss whether changes in social and urban policies in Greece enhance or inhibit access of the poor to secure housing, employment, and good quality of care. We identify key elements of an ‘emergency’ model for managing the social crisis associated with the sovereign debt crisis and austerity, offer some interpretation about the processes of its formation, and highlight its criticisms and alternatives suggested by service providers and civil society organizations.

Key Words: Greece, Poverty, Homelessness, Social Exclusion, Social Policy

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# **Poverty and Homelessness in Athens: Governance and the Rise of an Emergency Model of Social Crisis Management**

## **1. Introduction**

Homelessness as a social policy issue in Greece has only recently been recognized in the context of the prolonged economic crisis, so its documentation is limited. For more than a decade, the Greek administration has not responded to requests from national research centres, charities, the European Commission, and Eurostat to establish a monitoring system and provide data for inadequate housing and homelessness (FEANTSA 2012). Our research, supported by the Hellenic Observatory at the LSE, has in part addressed this gap and documented different forms of homelessness by using participative methods and a variety of sources (Arapoglou and Goinis 2014).

The core of our research was a survey amongst the most significant and largest shelter providers in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. Twenty-five organisations, implementing a total of 77 projects directly addressing the needs of more than 120,000 persons who experience acute forms of poverty and homelessness, responded and completed our survey. The survey included organizations of the Hellenic Anti-Poverty network and the Greek Network of Housing Rights, as well as key local authorities in Athens and Piraeus. In addition, three case studies with NGOs focused on the challenges for expanding supported

housing schemes in Greece. Research tools and results were discussed in two workshops with representatives of the above mentioned networks, public and local agencies.

Findings suggest a significant rise of visible homelessness and an excessive magnitude of hidden poverty, housing inadequacy, and insecurity, which generate demands that hardly can be met. A total number of 9,100 people were estimated to have experienced some form of visible homelessness during 2013 in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. However, this figure is only a fragment of the whole picture: in a metropolis of 3.8 million people, 305,000 Greek and 209,000 foreign nationals in privately rented accommodation face the risks of poverty and social exclusion as defined by Eurostat. The total figure of 514,000 individuals can be taken as an estimate of precariously housed individuals whose trajectories into and out of visible homelessness depend on limited shelter provisions, strict regulations for receipt of assistance and complex societal processes shaping access to secure housing, income, and community care.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, we offer an overview on the types of existing provisions for the homeless in Athens and discuss whether they enhance or inhibit the access of homeless people to secure housing, employment, and good quality of care. Secondly, a wider concern of this paper is to highlight changes in social policies for the homeless and the poor in Greece and place them within a historical perspective. The paper takes a path-dependence approach to policy change, by acknowledging that levels of urban poverty and homelessness in Europe have been rising since the 1990s with the

gradual demise of universal welfare provisions, the erosion of social citizenship, and unwillingness to enforce basic human rights for migrants in receiving EU countries (Mingione 1996; Arapoglou 2014). Therefore, the paper attempts to identify what is radically 'new' in policies for the poor and the homeless when compared to the previous decade and asks how policy making, at different scales, shapes the effects of the crisis and the potential for change.

## **2. International Review: the Governance of Poverty and Homelessness**

Our overview of available types of assistance in Greece is placed within a historical context regarding broader social policy changes, which have an effect on the competencies and initiatives of homeless service providers (in Europe, for Europe, Cloke et al. 2010; for the U.S., Wolch and DeVerteuil 2001; for a recent cross-Atlantic comparison, DeVerteuil 2014). A new global consensus with regard to 'welfare pluralism,' 'urban governance,' and 'social innovations' (partnerships, networks, capacity building, NGOs and civil society) permeates most suggestions for innovations and policy reforms (a review of relevant EU guidelines to address homelessness in FEANTSA 2012, 2013).

Governance refers to the processes of coordination between state, civil, and market agencies, operating at different policy scales, and steering toward common objectives. Governance has been defined as "a concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on recourse to the authority of the state" (Stoker 2000, p. 93). Thus, the enhanced role of the civil

society and private economic actors has been given the illustrative name of 'governance beyond the state' (Swyngedouw 2005). Nonetheless, the level of 'state withdrawal' is contingent on the relational dynamics between state, market, and civil forces in times of crisis. Pressures to produce economic restructuring may shift to either 'stronger' state interventions or more delegation of power (Andreotti and Mingione 2014); Miciukiewicz et al. 2012; Swyngedouw 2005; Maloutas and Malouta 2004; Novy et al. 2012). It is especially in transitional moments and through 'state failures' that an 'institutional void' occurs, and is precisely the lack of clear norms and rules according to which policy making is conducted that opens up the possibility for policy change (Moulaert et al. 2007; Hajer 2003; Brenner 2004). There lies much of the social innovative potential of governance. Another distinctive feature of governance is that it involves the transfer of policy domains to transnational or sub-national scales. Indeed, 'jumping scales,' 'up-scaling' or 'down-scaling' of state powers is a process of policy change and a strategy to gain influence (Pierre 2014; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Swyngdeow 2005).

The rearrangement of the market, state, and civil society relationships and the redefinition of policy objectives and strategies, gives shape to distinctive '*models*' of governance. For example, Pierre (1999) distinguished between 'managerialist,' 'corporatist,' 'pro-growth,' and 'welfare' oriented models. It has been argued that socially innovative arrangements are increasingly Janus-faced and constrained by the erosion of the democratic character of policy-making and the top-down imposition of market-oriented rules (Swyngdeow 2005). As a result, many authors converge to the idea that a 'managerialist' approach to



anti-poverty and anti-homelessness policies predominates (Wolch and Deverteuil 2001; Peck 2011).

Recently, Peck (ibid.) has highlighted that the rediscovery of poverty by international organizations relies on the promotion of *'fast moving'* models, which effectively operate within "zones of experimentation" and facilitate the transmission of, and local adaptations to, market rationalities and logics. Moreover, policy change is path-dependent, and the capacity of civil and social economy initiatives to promote inclusive processes of innovation also relies on the historically established rules and architecture of distinctive welfare systems (Oosterlynck et al. 2013; Gerometta et al. 2005; Moulaert et al. 2013). This view is vividly illustrated by the metaphor of the 'butterfly' (civil and local actors) confronting the 'elephant' (established hierarchies in social policy institutions) (Oosterlynck et al. 2013). Focusing on common national constraints, Oosterlynck et al. (ibid), argue that social innovations in southern European countries remain fragmented when confronting clientelism (prevailing of particularistic interests, highly exclusive participation, and waste of resources), populism (symbolic tokenism and rhetoric), and familism (family solidarity substitutes for lack of public provisions).

In this context, we argue that a distinctive model of governance can be discerned – first, by examining whether homelessness as the object of governance is narrowly defined to address only the visible aspects poverty or is linked to invisible dimensions of poverty; and secondly, by examining a series of choices regarding the welfare mix of services (public, private, non-profit), decentralization of resources and

responsibilities, targeting of vulnerable groups or universality of services, and provisions in cash or kind. In the Greek case, we explore key choices concerning the balance between ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ provisions, and the balance between housing, health, and employment assistance. Although such choices are centrally taken and concern regulations and social protection provisions, the type of care available is also shaped by the competencies of providers to attract funding, their expertise in a specific field or service to a particular population, their alliances and partnerships, and the methods applied to assess the needs of the homeless. The international literature suggests that ‘emergency’ solutions, decentralisation of competencies without resources, or preferential treatment of certain providers, give rise to fragmentation, to ‘creaming-off’ applicants, and ultimately to a series of exclusions (Hopper 2003; Wolch and Deverteuil 2001; Cloke et al. 2010). On the other hand, it is worth exploring how advocacy of innovations, like supported housing, has in certain cases been successful in advancing inclusive strategies for the homeless (Hopper 2003; 2011).

In recent years, supported housing has become synonymous with the Housing First model initially pioneered in New York City by Pathways to Housing, which proposed to end chronic homelessness for adults with psychiatric or substance abuse diagnoses who constitute the most visible and vulnerable group of the homeless population (Tsemberis 2010). Traditional approaches have failed to engage this subset of the homeless and they have been shown to over-burden emergency and inpatient services, with the disproportionately high cost associated with these arrangements (Kuhn and Culhane 1998; Culhane 2008). Pathways Housing First (PHF) constituted a radical, and initially controversial,

departure from the established practices associated with the linear, continuum-of-care approach. The latter, a “Treatment First” model, prioritises mental health and substance use treatment needs, with the goal of an eventual attainment of “housing readiness.” PHF, on the other hand, reverses this sequence and begins with the immediate provision of stable, permanent housing in scatter-site apartments, without any conditions of treatment adherence.” The principles of PHF emphasise a consumer-driven, individualised and non-compulsory engagement with services, a harm-reduction approach that does not place demands and conditions often impossible to meet, and a normal, community-based and autonomous type of residence.

PHF has been championed as an evidence-based program model for ending chronic homelessness. A host of studies in the USA showed unexpected housing retention rates across Housing First programs) Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2000; Mares and Rosenheck 2010; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2007), as well as significant reductions in costly service utilization (Tsemberis et al. 2004; Bendixen 2008; Perlman and Parvensky 2006). The demonstrated effectiveness in improving residential outcomes and especially the significant reductions in economic costs made it the recommended strategy, first in the USA, and more recently on an international scale.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It is noteworthy that in the USA PHF was elevated to national policy during the conservative Bush administration, primarily on the basis of the economic considerations. This otherwise socially progressive proposition appealed to the conservative Republicans simply because it saves money. In that respect, in the USA PHF has been a “curious case” of policy change – it can satisfy different stakeholders, conservatives and liberals alike (Stanhope and Dunn 2011).

In the European context, a Housing First (HF) movement has been gaining momentum and is taking centre-stage in EU and national strategies for dealing with homelessness (Pleace and Bretherton 2013; Johnson et al. 2012; Johnsen and Teixeira 2012). However, in Europe, HF is thought of and implemented in a somewhat modified version. The term “Housing-Led” has been proposed in order to capture these modifications, which are based on perceived differences – among them, the characteristics of the targeted population, the social and historical context of homelessness, and an altogether dissimilar tradition of public welfare systems. “Housing Led” approaches seek to explore how provisions for secure tenure can be introduced at an early stage of engagement and be part of a comprehensive package (Atherton and McNauton Nichols 2012). Research evidence has been produced from applications in the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Portugal, Hungary (Atherton and McNauton Nichols 2012; Greenwood et al. 2013; Busch-Geertsema 2013) and much of the debate calls for a comparison between ‘staircase’ and ‘housing- first’ models.

The Housing First model has reshaped the landscape of homelessness and rewrote the terms in which measures to address it have been framed. Yet, despite the acknowledged effectiveness with the most visible and vulnerable subset of the homeless population, a critical assessment of its overall effect raises broader, and perhaps more fundamental questions: namely, how it affects our understanding of the nature of homelessness and how it fits in with larger issues of poverty and community building. Regarding the former question, Pleace (2011) wonders whether precisely because of the focus on the most visible and vulnerable individuals, who are the minority of homeless people,

Housing First eclipses the scale and depth of less visible forms of homelessness and deprivation and downplays the role of labour markets, welfare systems and lack of affordable housing for the poor. With respect to the latter issue, Hopper and Barrow (2003) trace “two genealogies of supported housing,” in which consumer-driven approaches that focus on enhancing demand by promoting individual unit affordability in a market-dominated context are contrasted with an “integrated housing development” strategy, in which access to housing is embedded within a broader context of increasing housing supply for diverse constituencies of the poor, including those with “special needs” that promotes the “building of community” both within the specific building and more broadly in the surrounding area.

In our view, these concerns indicate that the overall success of supported housing schemes, such as PHF, is contingent, on the one hand, upon the extent to which they constitute the central component in a comprehensive approach in addressing homelessness whose philosophy is shared by the agencies involved in its implementation, and on the other, on the availability of the necessary resources to support them on a long-term basis. With these considerations in mind, one might be concerned that in a context of crisis, such as the one plaguing Greece at the moment, supported housing, in whatever shape, runs the risk of becoming yet another item in a mix of makeshift, emergency-oriented responses.

### **3. The Rise of an Emergency Model of Social Crisis Management**

In the following sections, we report the results of our survey and examine how the preference for short-term solutions, the shift of social policy tasks to non-governmental organisations, reliance on charitable funding, and preference for assistance in kind have given rise to an ‘emergency model of social crisis governance,’ which inherits most of the deficiencies of a managerial social policy approach. We then use the responses of the agencies that participated in our survey to identify how this model sets barriers to inclusion of the homeless and weakens the capacities of agencies to respond to their needs. Yet, we also point out the extraordinary resilience of some organisations, their responses to adverse conditions, and demands for alternative routes of change.

#### 3.1 Key changes and shifting scales of policy-making since 2011

Recent social policy reforms in Greece have been framed by the requirements for bail-out agreements with its lenders. We wish also to highlight the tension between the strengthening of the supra-national mechanisms for the European Union’s economic governance, associated with the stability and growth pact, and the delegation of efforts to take account of the social dimensions of the crisis to national and sub-national authorities, private and third sector agencies. In the Europe 2020 strategy, wider concerns related to social and territorial cohesion have been increasingly confined to deal with poverty and acute forms of destitution by promoting social investment and social innovation strategies in a rather ambivalent manner.

The Social Investment Package (SIP) is the main policy instrument to promote the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy against poverty and social exclusion. The SIP brings together a number of financing instruments and policy initiatives but, often, as an ad-hoc response to rising poverty and deprivation rates in the member states. Such for example are the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, or more recently, the 'Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)' to which many NGOs and local authorities rely for financing anti-poverty and social inclusion policies.

According to recent research, policy reforms related to the 'social investment' idea, have failed to counterbalance the social effects of austerity measures, mainly because they corrode the conventional income maintenance guarantees and social expenditures, which addressed the housing and healthcare needs of the poor (Cantillon and Van Lancker 2013, Pintelon et al 2013, Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx 2011). Although the concept has attracted the attention of not-for-profit organizations, it has also been criticized for introducing market forms of provision and finance, which imply competition amongst welfare providers and are inadequate to meet the needs of the most deprived clients (Cantillon and Van Lancker 2013). A contradiction results from the fact that social investment and social innovation strategies in the EU increasingly rely on targeted and conditional support to those exposed to greater risks though the erosion of social protection systems and universal coverage.

Bonifacio (2014) intuitively suggested that social investment and innovation can better be seen as a policy compromise that can be used

to detract from debates around the need to develop a fully-fledged EU Social Policy. In this sense, we suggest social investment and social innovation ideals that orient EU anti-poverty policies should not be seen as deep-seated consensus but rather as a compromise formulated within what Peck (2011), as noted above, called a '*zone of experimentation*' delineated by the market ideology. Moreover, the shrinking of social investment to emergency relief sets in track a relapse to its early association with neoliberal safety nets (Jenson 2010).

Specific policy changes directly affecting the provisions for the poor and the homeless in Greece can be traced back to 2011 when the Greek government and the EU had to finalize the bailout package and to secure the transfer of emergency aid for Greece. Within this context, the Greek government, in collaboration with the European Commission, attempted to speed up the process of public administration reforms. 'Technical assistance' was offered to Greece for the implementation of the EU/IMF adjustment program and the absorption of EU funds in order to address the social consequences of the crisis. Poverty, homelessness, and the humanitarian situation faced by migrants and asylum seekers were emphasized in subsequent EU reports. The Greek Government was advised to give priority to the most vulnerable groups and to urban regeneration so as to make effective use of EU structural funds.

An aspect of this process was that the Greek administration produced an operational definition of homelessness, so that homeless people could be recognized as a 'vulnerable group' and accordingly EU funds could be drawn for their relief. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 2012, Law 4052 was passed describing the new competencies of the Ministry of Health and



the Ministry of Labour for the application of the EU/IMF finance agreement. Article 29 of the Law set out a definition of the homeless, for the first time in a Greek legislative document.

*The homeless are recognized as a vulnerable social group to which social protection is provided. Homeless persons are defined as: All persons legally residing in the country, who lack access to safe and adequate accommodation, owned, rented or freely released, and which would meet the technical requirements and basic amenities for water and electricity. 2. The homeless include particularly those living in the streets or shelters and those who are hosted, out of need, in institutions or other enclosed forms of care' (Law 4052)*

A criticism to this article came from the members of the very same committee that drafted the legislation and relied on the homelessness classification of FEANTSA. The criticism referred to the phrase that was added during the passing of the law (*'legally residing'*) so as to exclude from provisions people in the early phases of applying for asylum. (The change was made under the request of the LAOS party—a small nationalist party that had joined a coalition government in late 2011-early 2012). It was also a matter of concern of organisations working with people in the early stages of applying for asylum or even supporting the repatriation of undocumented migrants that minimal provisions should be offered to their clients. The assistance to severely destitute populations through street work and outreach was complicated by the legal amendment. In addition to humanitarian concerns, the amendment undermined the official documentation of homelessness

because it made extremely difficult for any court to verify who has legal documents and who does not.

Law 4052 laid the foundation for subsequent measures for the poor and the homeless but a disagreement within the administration has left an important imprint, one that we have also encountered during our research. During the preparation of the law (4052), two Action Plans were being drafted: a *Homelessness Action Plan* by the Ministry of Health and an *Action Plan for a Network of Immediate Social Interventions to address the psychosocial needs of the poor and the homeless* by the Ministry of Labour. The two Plans had different philosophy and orientation. The Plan of the Ministry of Health was informed by FEANTSA guidelines and was designed after consulting a wide array of providers. It laid emphasis on targeted prevention and introduced user participation in service delivery and Housing Led schemes. The Plan of the Ministry of Labour gave priority to emergency and employability provisions. In the very same law (4052), which provided the legal definition of homelessness, the Department of Social Assistance in the Ministry of Health, which actually led in the drafting of homelessness legislation, was transferred to the Ministry of Labour. This change was part of a cost containment strategy by merging government departments. Eventually, the political administration chose to implement the programme of the Ministry of Labour. Its structure and provisions have been a vital influence for changing the landscape of services.

Yet, as a response to public concern and pressures from NGOs, the Greek Prime Minister announced on 14th April 2014 a new initiative for

the homeless. The initiative was announced as part of the 'social dividend' idea, i.e. a small share from the 2013 primary surplus to be distributed to vulnerable beneficiaries through benefits and services. The total social dividend benefits were estimated to amount to 500 million Euros, of which 20 million Euros were to be allocated to new services for the homeless.

In the following months, the Ministry of Labour drafted a programme and on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 issued a call for proposals. The total budget of the programme is 9.400.000 Euros and is designed to assist 800 individuals for up to one year (of which approximately 55% in the region of Attica). The programme declares a planning preference for housing apartments over emergency and transitory structures and sets out a concrete target that 30% of the eligible population should reach complete autonomy and independent living. The target groups of the program include: families and individuals accommodated in transitory hostels, night shelters, service users of Day Centres, families and individuals who have been registered as homeless by municipal social departments, women victims of violence, individuals to be discharged from child protection structures. The programme includes housing benefits, and partial cover of utility bills or other living expenses.

On paper, the programme seems a corrective step to the severe imbalances that have resulted from emergency type measures and introduces housing benefits as a component of social inclusion policies. However, significant drawbacks are noticeable. First, there were no formal and substantive procedures for public deliberation. The head of the Ministry informally consulted some of the interested local and civil

agencies that pursued their own lobbying agendas. Second, approximately half of the 20 million Euros have been given away to soup kitchens and food provision, primarily operated by the Church of Greece. Third, the duration of the programme, and respectively the funds secured, is extremely short for the planning targets, and ultimately can be harmful to those it claims to help, because one year of implementation is inadequate time for recovery and reintegration of vulnerable persons. Fourth, the programme is generous in financing housing assistance, but already operating innovative schemes (Arapoglou and Gounis 2014, Chapter 6:4 and Chapter 7) are significantly less costly. Fifth, the programme lacks a coherent philosophy, priorities, and structure. There is lack of distinction between prevention and rehousing. Likewise, it is unclear whether it prioritizes a Housing First or a 'staircase' approach. This sharply contrasts to the policy jargon of social investment or social innovations. Last, but not least, the target of 800 beneficiaries is extremely inadequate to address the needs of the homeless individuals in need of assistance (ibid. Chapter 4), and even to housing schemes financed through private donations (ibid. Chapter 6.2).

Nonetheless, unrecognised pathways of policy changes can be identified in initiatives financed through European funds prior to the crisis and have been embedded in the national policy framework. Such are the assistance of the European Refugee Fund for asylum seekers<sup>2</sup> and the

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<sup>2</sup>In the same direction, funding from the European Economic Area (EEA) Grants was directed to recent important initiatives like the "SOAM Programme /Supporting Organisations that assist migrant asylum seeking population in Greece" and "Solidarity and Social Inclusion in Greece"(involving the city of Athens).

most innovative aspects of the reform of mental health services in Greece (PSYCHARGOS plan). Notably, both pathways involved the collaboration of international human rights organisations and European institutions with NGOs, professional associations, and pioneers within the Greek administration, particularly under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. In both cases, policy change has proceeded in complex and often conflicting ways. Yet, good housing practices in asylum provisions and mental health remained unexploited in policies to tackle homelessness, often as a consequence of adopting a narrow definition of visible chronic and “voluntary” homelessness amongst Greek citizens.

Nonetheless, post-crisis EU policies and reforms guided through the principles of social investment and social innovation are contradictory and tend to encourage the residualisation of social policies. Thus, the attempts of NGOs and local authorities to use the new financial instruments of the EU and other international agencies remain fragmented and the capacity for developing integrated social inclusion policies is severely diminished.

### 3.2 ‘Project led’ responses, welfare mix and target groups

The majority of respondents to our survey are NGOs, but the most significant public agencies under the supervision of the National Centre of Social Solidarity (NCSS), as well as the shelters of the two largest local authorities (Athens and Piraeus), are included in our results. What appears to be an overrepresentation of NGOs should not be considered as a sample bias and is not the result of methodological choice. It rather reflects significant institutional changes in the provision of care for the poor and homeless in Greece.

The vast majority of the NGOs in our sample have been founded after 1994, a sign of the strengthening of civil society during that period. Since the beginning of the 1990s, NGOs came into the scene due to humanitarian concern for the conditions of immigrants, the mentally ill, women and children in Greek cities, and during the next decades grew through the financing by the EU and the Greek state. Many gained experience by participating in international aid and development programmes outside Greece. It becomes clear from the survey data and interviews that NGOs are on the epicentre of what has been described as the ‘humanitarian crisis’ in Greece since 2010. First, they became the main receptors of urgent needs expressed by populations affected by unemployment and poverty who not only lost access to work but also to social assistance, healthcare, and housing. It should be emphasised that the effects of the crisis on the poor population are twofold (direct and indirect): on the one hand, poverty expands and deepens as a result of unemployment and loss of income, and on the other, austerity measures and social policy reforms create new risks and obstacles for the poor. Responding to the emergence of new needs, most of the NGOs spontaneously developed actions for a variety of populations beyond their initial target groups and expertise. In due course, official policies are increasingly designed to give NGOs a prominent role in addressing poverty and social exclusion.

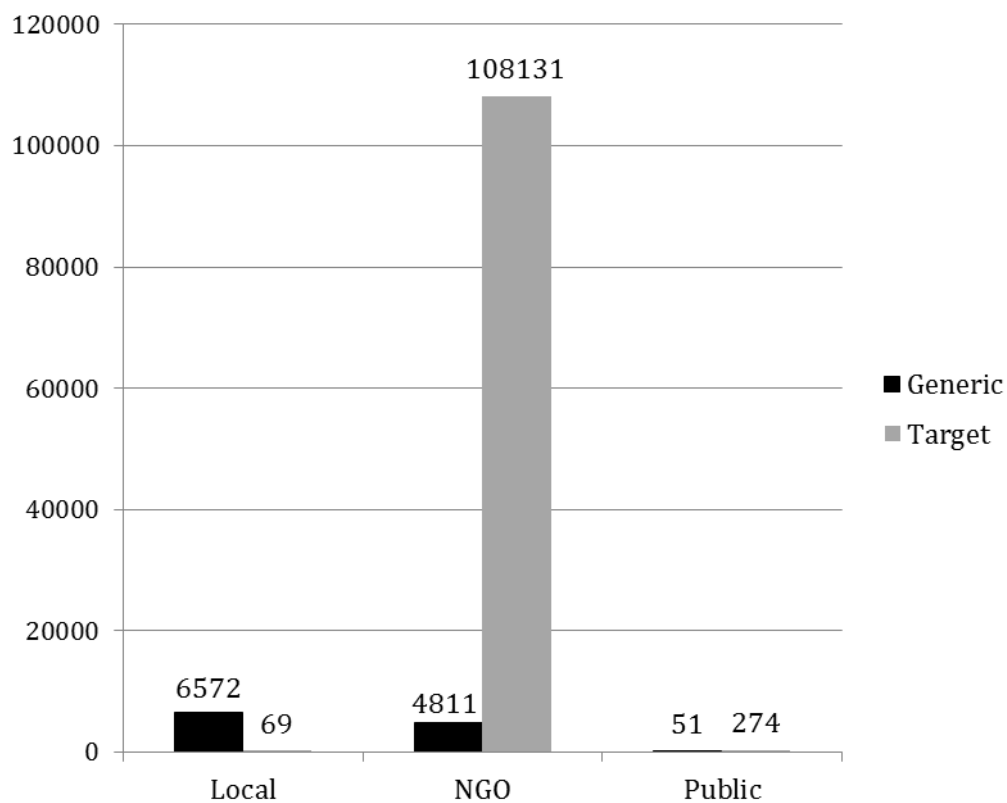
Decentralization of services and allocation of tasks and funds to local authorities moves at a slow pace. First, national layers of provision have been eroded or abolished. During interviewing we witnessed uncertainty and ambivalence regarding the role of central public entities like the NCSS. Whilst the role of the NCSS in service delivery is diminishing, there

have been incremental attempts to strengthen its monitoring and supervising function. Second, lack of public resources and inefficiencies within local authority agencies slows down the process of decentralization.

Significantly, we recorded many forms of collaboration between NGOs and local authority agencies, evidencing a new kind of mix in service delivery. From the total number of 77 projects reported in our survey, approximately two thirds have been developed through some form of partnership between different providers. Certainly, this was not the case 15 years ago when collaboration between providers was extremely limited (Arapoglou 2004). Nonetheless, service delivery on an ad-hoc project basis seems to be contributing to fragmentation and partnership tensions.

The prevalence of NGOs in this new type of project-based service delivery is vividly represented in Figure 1, reporting the number of service users for each type of provider.

**Figure 1: Number of service users by type of provider/ generic & targeted homeless groups**



Source: UoC Survey 2014

The NGOs in our survey alone serve close to 115.000 persons in the metropolitan region of Athens. The total number reveals a dramatic picture, especially when considering that housing assistance of any type or form is not available for this deprived population. Local authorities, despite political rhetoric, play a secondary role. Services and shelter accommodations provided by public agencies are minimal.

Significantly, the prevalence of NGOs is related to the type of services offered and the populations served, in contrast with public agencies. Generic services and shelters for the homeless are the primary form of provision by the latter. A few shelters run by public agencies have been



turned to specialised units mainly for women, young people, and children. NGOs, on the other hand, mostly deliver specialised services, targeting various groups with particular needs.

In practise, different projects are often implemented within the same premises, creating a distinctive landscape of provision with diverse individuals in terms of gender, ethnicity, or age. On the one hand, demographic and ethnic diversity is an asset for NGOs and is related to their role in advocating for the rights of clients often excluded from public provisions. On the other, as one of our informants self reflectively stated, the 'project culture' introduces the risk of turning NGOs into 'Supermarket-NGOs.'

A very significant change is that private sources are now the most vital resource of finance for NGOs and increasingly local authorities. This picture contrasts with the previous decade when public and EU grants were the primary source of finance even for NGOs. Private companies and charitable foundations are sponsoring many of the projects we visited. Consequently, as some respondents noted, reliance on donors and sponsors enhances uncertainty and undermines the sustainability of projects because the preferences of donors are highly volatile.

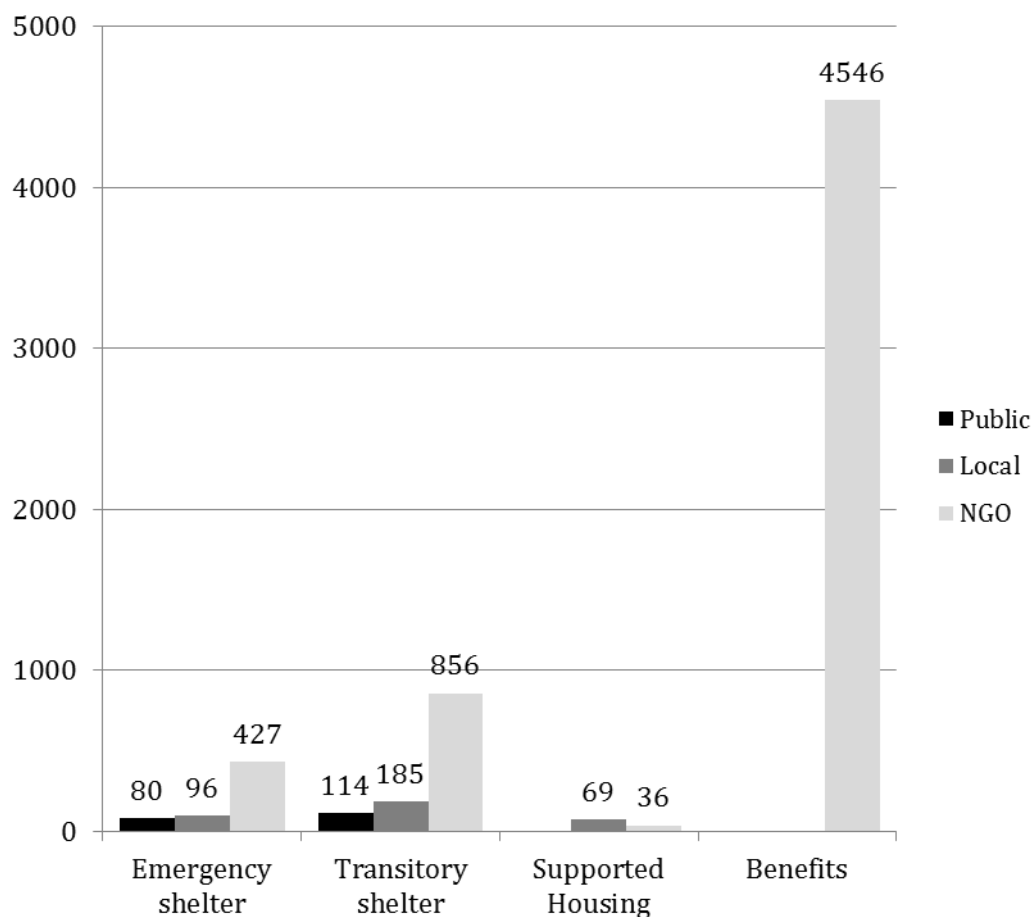
#### *Types of accommodation and services*

The survey has recorded 30 accommodation and housing assistance projects: 9 emergency shelters, mostly introduced by the new plan of the Ministry of Labour; 10 transitory shelters run by local authorities, the National Centre of Social Solidarity, and NGOs; 6 supported housing schemes, financed by the Ministries of Health and private donors; and 5

schemes of housing benefits financed by private donors and the European Fund of Refugees.

Figure 2 is also illustrative of the effort and innovations introduced by NGOs. The numbers of persons sheltered and receiving assistance by NGOs again outnumber those who have relied on local or public providers.

**Figure 2: Beneficiaries by type of accommodation and housing assistance**



Source: UoC Survey 2014

Transitory shelters are the prevalent form of accommodation and include both shelters for the general homeless population (mainly older Greek men), as well as shelters for specific target groups of women, children, and refugees. Emergency shelters are a new form of accommodation in the Athenian context and mainly attract Greek homeless men who do not have access to transitory shelters. Supported housing schemes in Greece have been initiated in the context of mental health reforms and more recently in the context of support for asylum seekers. Housing benefits to refugees has been an innovation introduced and financed through the European Refugee Fund. A pilot project spanned off this successful experience, as one of the participating NGOs developed a similar scheme for poor overburdened Greek families through charity grants and sponsorships. This scheme combined benefits with case management and floating services, and its experience led the organisation to consider designing and implementing a Housing First programme. A pilot project initiated by the city of Athens and a small NGO, which attracted media attention prior to the 2014 municipal elections and came to be known as "the apartment building of the homeless," was still in its very early steps of development during the research period. (Since then, two small apartment buildings with a 12-person capacity have been renovated and equipped with a donation from a private tobacco company, in collaboration with a Greek NGO and the Municipality of Athens.)

The majority of survey respondents reported an increase of shelter users since 2010, which reaches 40%. Only two public shelters and one local agency report a decrease of shelter users, and this possibly relates to the fact that new shelters, with more relaxed admission regulations, have

provided an alternative to the former. The average increase of demands for housing assistance since 2010 has been reported to be 58%. On average, 40% of applications remain unmet, however, and it should be taken into consideration that many individuals are deterred to apply by strict regulations and waiting periods for admission tests. Average capacity utilization has been estimated to be 80%, but with great variation (25%-100%): some shelters are full, while some others do not operate throughout the year, and some constantly have empty beds.

Overall, our research indicates that a model of 'emergency' shelters and assistance in kind has been introduced by the policies of the Ministry of Labour, and is gradually consolidating. Night shelters, Day Centres, food banks, social pharmacies and social groceries have been established in this context. Night-shelters give a temporary solution to many applicants rejected from other transitory shelters, which often apply strict regulations for admission. Night shelters are also a relief for episodic homelessness, but do not prevent shifts in and out of different forms of homelessness. It is premature to assess their impact, but the American experience suggests the ineffectiveness of emergency provisions. Our site visits and interviews informed us about a significant aspect in the operation of Day Centres. Namely, Day Centres not only attract street homeless individuals but an array of invisible poor in their search for healthcare services. Especially those Day Centres that are linked to day clinics open a door for health care and assistance. It has been a matter of great concern that a poor population with no health insurance or incapable of paying contributions for medication revolves around Day Centres and clinics. From interviews and data released by the Church of

Greece and the Athens Medical Association we estimate that this number should be around 200,000 people in the Greater Athens area.

This distinctively 'new' policy landscape does not entail that inadequate services and old-fashioned structures established during the 1990s have been made obsolete. For example, large generic units are intended to offer transitory accommodation to individuals who would gradually be socially reintegrated. Shelters of this kind are mainly run by local and public agencies, combining bureaucratic procedures with a philanthropic spirit. A significant number of beds are empty due to strict admission regulations, whilst, at the same time, the majority of residents remain longer than expected. The history of this type of accommodation, and its deficiencies, as it appeared in Greece and the US, has been elsewhere discussed by the authors of this report (Arapoglou 2004; Gounis 1992). During some of our on-site visits we experienced a sense of *déjà vu*: different people, different places, but a familiar spirit and rhetoric, tokenism combined with blaming the homeless, lack of expertise, and resistance to change.

### 3.3 Policy gaps and barriers to inclusion

In our survey, we asked the agencies to assess whether access by their clients to health services, housing and benefits have improved or worsened since the onset of the crisis in 2010. The results indicate a slight deterioration of access across all domains (health, housing, and benefits). During the in-depth interviews and workshops, the participating agencies made it clear that initiatives specifically designed to serve destitute citizens could not counterbalance changes in the regulatory framework for the use of public services. Most significantly,

negative changes concerned unemployment and income assistance benefits and access to the healthcare system, especially for costly treatments and services like examinations, in-patient treatment, and medication. Not surprisingly, when considering the introduction of new night-shelters and short-stay hostels, access to temporary accommodation was not viewed as the main area of negative changes.

Answers to open questions in the survey regarding the key barriers of the homeless to services were codified and reveal four main areas of concern: Inadequate coverage of the poor and the unemployed by existing benefits; loss of insurance coverage that makes medical treatment inaccessible; strict regulations and long waiting lists for access to shelters; and discrimination practices and stigmatisation in public health services. Notably, these issues concern both financial barriers imposed by austerity policies (as in the case of unemployment benefits and uninsured persons), organizational deficiencies (as in the case of strict regulations for admission to shelters and/or lack of expertise), or cultural constraints (stigmatisation and discrimination in public health services). Examples from interviews with service staff and vignettes were illustrative of the dramatic conditions of the people they assisted and their interactions in some public health services, employment, and local welfare agencies.

Key organisations expressed their concerns that 'emergency' provisions are increasingly becoming a stable feature of social policies and criticisms were expressed regarding the call for the most recent (2014) Ministry of Labour programme to address homelessness (as described above). Some of the most experienced organisations were extremely

reluctant to engage in its implementation, and instead suggested the implementation of a reform plan along the lines of the one designed by the Ministry of Health in 2012, emphasizing targeted prevention for families and Housing First schemes for the most vulnerable chronic and episodic homeless groups. In recognition of the acute needs and deepening exclusions of the visible homeless, service providers tended to support the retention of emergency night-shelters and the introduction of pilot initiatives for the special needs of drug users.

During workshops and in interviews, members of the Hellenic Anti-poverty Network reported the markedly low coverage of the unemployed by benefits (as confirmed by the Greek “Manpower Employment Organization,” only 25% unemployed persons were receiving benefits at the end of 2012). They also expressed reservations about the Government’s announcement concerning the introduction of a Minimum Guaranteed Income Scheme due to the fact that is not connected to a minimum wage to guarantee decent living standards. Administrative difficulties were also mentioned with regards to means testing procedures and eligibility criteria, and to low capacity of local authorities to overtake such responsibilities with current levels of human resources.

With regard to loss of insurance coverage, the participants in our workshop welcomed the ministerial decree expanding emergency and in-patient treatment of uninsured citizens to public hospitals but also clarified a series of deficiencies allowing discriminatory practices in its implementation. They also pointed out the lack of adequate pharmaceutical supplies in public hospitals, and how market prices and

high co-payment rates prohibited treatment even to insured persons. The introduction of preventive diagnostic tests for unemployed and uninsured individuals, with financing from EU funds (ΕΣΠΑ), was also considered as a positive step, although the overall framework of its planning and implementation conforms to the rationale of 'emergency' and its future financing is uncertain.

Through open questions in our survey and in interviews, it was possible to detect specific concerns regarding the employment insecurity of permanent staff in both public agencies and NGOs, reductions in seasonal or temporary staff in public and local hostels, wage cuts in all agencies, constraints in the recruitment of specialized staff in public agencies, and shift of work tasks to volunteers. In addition to inadequate funding, survey respondents emphasized instability and extreme delays in public payments to NGOs and excessively bureaucratic management and monitoring structures. Especially, the shift to 'per capita funding' was said to have led practices of 'client hunting.' Moreover, some tended to perceive a mismatch between donors' preference for "in kind," "short-term" forms of assistance and the needs of agencies and their clients. Small, locally based organisations expressed concerns that charity funds and donors prefer "big players" with greater visibility.

On the other hand, we documented a great deal of organizational resilience to adverse conditions, which includes increased willingness for voluntary work, intensification of cooperation between local and social agencies, and improvement of neighbourhood attitudes to NGOs. These positive aspects are indicative of an atmosphere of solidarity and a



culture of giving that we confirmed in many instances through our on-site visits to shelters and Day Centres.

### 3.4 Supported housing: demands for change and innovation challenges

As mentioned above, supported housing schemes in Greece have been initiated in the context of mental health reforms. Mental health associations that pioneered these reforms have expertise in offering quality support to sheltered and street homeless individuals, through cost-effective means. During interviews we listened to their concerns about both the closing of two psychiatric hospitals in Attica, as well as to understaffing and under-financing of existing schemes. Uncoordinated planning between the Ministries of Health and Labour was specifically held to be a major obstacle for change. Moreover, policy proposals from their side included provisions for specialised schemes for the chronic mentally ill homeless as well as targeted Housing First schemes.

The increase in the number of asylum seekers in need of housing, and the mobilization of NGOs led to introduction of new supported housing and benefit schemes. The majority offer short term sheltering and support, but important elements in their design advance feelings of security and dignity. Rather than applying ‘admission requirements,’ their implementation relies on prioritising housing needs on the basis of vulnerability; this in itself has been an innovation in the culture of Greek public administration. Although the operation of a newly established Asylum Service was acknowledged to be a positive step, the operation of housing and social inclusion schemes by the Ministry of Public Safety (which everyone still refers to under its old name – Ministry of Public Order) and its centralized control was seen as an obstacle. The demand

was for opening regional offices, establishing open accommodation structures for unaccompanied minors, families and women and expanding the operation of housing benefit schemes.

Indeed, housing benefits to refugees has been an innovation introduced and financed through the European Refugee Fund. A pilot project span off this successful experience, as one of the participating NGOs developed a similar scheme for poor overburdened Greek families through charity grants and sponsorships. The management of this scheme, the application of floating services to families and negotiation with landlords, has been a vital source of experience for the organisation that initiated it and advocates for its expansion.

Overall, it seems that policy initiatives can utilise prior knowledge and experience. In particular, NGOs working with immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as mental health agencies, are in a position to adapt their operations to the current circumstances and to introduce innovative supported housing schemes tailored to new types of demand and vulnerabilities.

Through the in-depth study of three civil society organizations we explored the potential for introducing and expanding supported housing schemes as a means of addressing the needs of individuals with mental health disorders and substance users. The three case-studies provided us with evidence on the value of diversity of supported housing models. Housing first in particular, was seen as a means of introducing a novel way of thinking, although welfare professionals and especially front-line staff are not familiar with its values and operation. Policy progress, then, relies on breaking away from the culture shaped in conditions of

emergency, as well as from a culture of ‘social and employment rehabilitation’ that unrealistically ties all forms of re-insertion to employment and neglects the needs for quality treatment.

The clear distinction between the ‘housing’ and the ‘treatment’ component in supported housing was also seen a facilitator of co-operation. Given that the expertise of any single organisation is either in housing or in treatment, the potential for partnership formation seemed viable by allocating tasks according to expertise and experience in serving different groups of clients. The legacy of community psychiatry and drug rehabilitation communities in Greece has a distinctive European orientation and serves creating spaces of care in-between the ‘staircase’ and Housing First dichotomy. It is a challenge for mental health agencies and to collaborate with civil and local organisations, expand floating services to inner city areas, and enhance options for non-residential treatment.

#### **4. Conclusions and policy implications**

In the main part of this article we tried to document the rise of an ‘emergency’ model for managing the social crisis associated with the sovereign debt crisis and austerity. Concluding the article, we summarize the key elements of this model, offer some interpretation about the processes of its emergence, and highlight its criticism by key stakeholders and their suggestions for its reversal. The primary feature of this model is a shift of caring tasks to NGOs mainly relying on private finance and donors, as has also been reported by other research (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos 2014). It should be stressed that public

withdrawal regards both NGO activities and direct public service provision. This trend could only euphemistically be called ‘welfare mix’, and can, modestly, be characterised a deepening of social policy residualization. The central state role has been downgraded to accountancy and cost-containment. It has only strengthened the mechanisms for monitoring project finance, without enhancing its strategic or regulatory role. The limited role of central state housing agencies, often operating in parochial manner by applying strict regulations for sheltering, has further diminished. The people relying on assistance by NGOs by far outweigh those on public, central state, or local authorities. Despite their increased role and anti-poverty rhetoric, local authorities lack not only resources but also planning capacities and expertise. As a result, the involvement of local authorities relies on the support of NGOs to access private and international sources of finance.

The rise of NGOs has not been a unique Greek phenomenon; a similar trend combined with public expenditure cuts and contracting of services for the homeless has been reported for other countries of Southern Europe: notably, in Portugal and Italy (Baptista 2013; Pezzana 2012). Nonetheless, we wish to emphasize the contradiction: at the same that the Greek Government shifted responsibilities to NGOs, it also depleted their capacities. The list, summarizing the valid complaints of our informants, is long: extremely long delays in payments, enforced shift of tasks to volunteers, levelling down of treatment and subsidized personnel costs, expansion of part-time and short-term contracts for welfare professionals, enforced constraints on client selection, low per-capita funding, erosion of public deliberation processes, preferential funding to the Church of Greece and politically affiliated players, etc.

Comparison of our recent findings with a similar exercise in the early 2000s (Arapoglou 2004) reveals that the demographic profile of the serviced population certainly includes more Greeks than in the past. A dramatic rise of housing insecurity and deprivation due to unemployment combines with loss of insurance coverage and income. The detrimental effects of eroding already limited social protection and off-loading the costs of social reproduction to families in Southern European countries has been documented by many researchers (e.g., Gutiérrez 2014, Papadopoulos and Roumpakis 2013). From interviews with NGOs, an even more alarming picture emerges – namely families confront extreme destitution and cannot prevent the marginalisation of their vulnerable members. Second, with regard to the most vulnerable amongst the foreign nationals in Greece, the current policies tend to cancel out the experience of housing initiatives obtained during the last ten years with the assistance of European funding, and instead prioritise intensified street-policing and containment in prisons and detention centres.

It is then a crucial question whether targeting policies, as the ones the Commission and Troika experts encouraged the Greek government to advance are of real value when, at the same time, universal provisions are undermined (Papatheodorou 2014; Petmezidou 2013; Petmezidou and Guillén 2014). Our findings, especially with regards to health and housing needs, indicate that specialised services alone are inadequate for a variety of reasons. The multiplicity and deepening of exclusions renders targeting a meaningless exercise, which results in strict regulations for providing assistance, administrative rejections, and long waiting lists. Moreover, targeting is often used as an excuse for creaming

off clients in inadequately staffed agencies, and cannot counterbalance stigmatisation, discrimination, and racism within local and public agencies. Such deficiencies are aggravated by the lack of preventive policies, a fact that eventually implies that targeting, at best, can only alleviate extreme forms of despair, and cannot countervail the stigmatisation of the most vulnerable segments of the poor population.

Another distinctive feature of the 'emergency model' concerns the prevalence of very short-term provisions in kind to meet basic needs (emergency shelters, soup kitchens, free clinics, day-centres) of the poor. The time-horizon of this type of spending is so limited that it would be unthinkable to place them under a social investment umbrella. Not only preventive measures are absent, but fragmented reinsertion measures lack a clear orientation and relevance to innovative examples. It is perhaps better to understand the expansion of such services as remedies to the erosion of social protection systems. Training, or employment counselling, which are typical examples of social policy activation, are ritualistic complements to transitory, medium-term interventions, which however are not linked to local development or real employment opportunities. Significantly, social services for homeless families and individuals such as childcare, or proper psychological treatment, are on offer only by a few specialized agencies. 'Project-led' solutions increase uncertainty and fragmentation, contributing to the recycling of hundreds of thousands of people without entitlements and deprived of fundamental rights, who navigate the city neighbourhoods for food, shelter, clothing and medication.

The numerous contradictions discussed above urge paying attention at different scales of policy making. A distinctive feature of the current condition is the lack of deep-seated consensus over policy reforms and a continuous experimentation, which involves successive tactics of manoeuvring and adaptation. However, it needs to be explained how a certain 'zone of experimentation' (Peck 2011) is shaped, both in discursive as well as financial terms. Austerity is the very material condition delineating the kind of policy experiments and governance manoeuvres. 'Supported housing' and 'minimum income' schemes may be considered good examples for studying in greater detail the contradictions of policy mobility. We wish to highlight four explanations as to why supported housing models do not travel fast – they cannot be as easily 'down-scaled' or 'up-scaled' as is often presumed. Respectively, we also draw attention to alternatives and reforms aiming to remove impediments for the successful design and implementation of supported housing.

First, anti-poverty measures most often rely on 'soft'- 'bottom-up' mechanisms of policy learning, in contrast to 'hard' – 'top-down' mechanisms of monetary and fiscal consolidation surveillance, as has been witnessed in both transition and southern European economies (de la Porte and Heins 2015, Ladi and Tsarouhas 2014, Woolfson and Sommers 2014). A typical example, homelessness emerged on the EU policy agenda through the Open Method of Co-ordination but without common policy objectives or any instruments for policy evaluation (Gosme 2014). Within such asphyxiating environments, the less powerful actors can only consent or adapt by cherry-picking socially innovative examples. Ethnographically, many of the instances we encountered and

the stories we were told could be well explained by the metaphor of a tightening noose that NGOs and their clients try to lessen. Given the early failure of the Europe 2020 agenda, researchers and activists started paying attention to the accountability of the EMU institutions and to the violation of fundamental human rights as a result of austerity programmes (Kilpatrick and De Witte 2014).

Second, a series of unintended consequences and misunderstandings stem from neglecting the normative assumptions of policy models, and especially those regarding the divergent rationalities of state-led, market-led, or community-led solutions. Thus, 'evidence based' policies become sterilized by cancelling out ideological distinctions and by erasing contextual differences. In the EU policy agenda, 'housing led' solutions have been linked to the social innovation and social investment discourse, but without discussing the different policy paradigms its implementation would entail. Moreover, in the Greek welfare context the concept of 'housing rights', underlying either liberal or communitarian variations of supported housing, seemed to stand in tension with familistic values associated with homeownership, xenophobia, secrecy and stigma of poverty and mental illness. Not surprisingly, the idea of long-term support remained out of the policy agenda, shelters were mistakenly presented as 'social housing', and 'rapid re-housing' was disconnected from treatment but linked to employment rehabilitation plans, because it was actually impossible to consider that the poor, the mentally ill, drug users or asylum seekers are entitled to support.



Third, governance implies some form of policy deliberation and established process for civil participation. In the Greek case of policy measures for the homeless, we have reported the dominant role of private consulting companies, the gradual erosion of public deliberation, clientelism, and political tokenism in drafting emergency plans for EU finance (see section above, and Arapoglou 2014). Such are typical constraints for up-scaling social innovations within Southern European regimes (Osterlynck et al. 2013).

Fourth, specific institutional and financial arrangements are necessary to embed special assistance within broader social and urban development objectives. Supported housing schemes can operate effectively by eliminating barriers to health and social services, and this actually requires combining universal health coverage with specialized housing structures for the most vulnerable. Access to mental health care is a specific challenge, and thus in Greece, advancing sectorisation of the mental health system is vital for organizing different levels of treatment, housing, and mobile services in the community. It is of utmost importance to open up accessibility of the existing mental health structures to non-institutionalized individuals with social vulnerabilities and link them with services to the homeless locally.

Key questions also rise regarding the financial architecture for supported housing and the means for achieving housing affordability and security of tenure. Many of the Greek examples were initiated by private donations, but up-scaling urges considering sources of public finance as well. Given ample supply of inexpensive housing in the private market during these times of economic downturn, there are good opportunities

for the introduction of low cost schemes. Yet, some sort of benefit or income assistance is necessary to partially finance their operation, especially if minimal requirements for 'normal' housing are adopted. Two further possibilities can be considered: a) combining housing with supportive employment and operation of social co-operatives according to the experience of rehabilitation units in psychiatric reforms, and b) use of available housing stock by public agencies and local authorities, especially in the context of revitalizing deprived neighbourhoods. The lack of adequate income assistance schemes is, then, the major constraint for the development of supported housing in Greece.

Last but not least, the design of preventive policies can be most a cost-effective means of addressing the problem. Preventive policies can be designed not only by targeting groups but also by responding to the conditions of invisible homelessness and poverty at an institutional level. Reforms of the asylum granting procedures and assistance to refugees, as well as reforms in the penal and the mental health system are of preventive nature. Discharges from asylums, closed types of care, and detention centres need to be carefully planned and accompanied with social insertion policies to reduce the numbers of those finding refuge in the streets or other forms of insecure shelter, especially for the younger ages.

The significance of supported housing remains partly unknown and partly unexplored, in a residual welfare regime where both housing and support have been exclusively assigned to families, their security, or social mobility strategies. In the very same context, the introduction of ultra-liberal, market-oriented values of individualized survival and

success creates a series of deadlocks. Consequently, we appreciate that any form of intervention should respect diversity, and, most importantly, capitalise the existing experience of pioneers in the field.

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