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...and why are there NGOs? The society is not enough!

*A study of the public opinion on homelessness in
Gothenburg*

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Abstract

Title	'...and why are there NGOs? The society is not enough! – a Study of The Public Opinion on Homelessness in Gothenburg'
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Purpose	<i>To examine the public opinion and the role of the media in the public opinion on homelessness among the citizens of Gothenburg</i>
Method	Focus groups
Material	Results from conversations about homelessness in four different focus groups
Main results	The subject of homelessness appears to be somewhat of a non-issue to the participants. They think it is important and have a lot of opinions regarding the situation, but at the same time it does not seem to be an issue that they consider in their everyday lives. Regarding definitions of homelessness, the participants mention two different ones: the more spontaneous definition includes people living on the streets (often referred to as drug addicts and alcoholics) and the second one includes people who have a place to stay but they do not have an address of their own. There are also two main views on the work that is being performed on homelessness: That very little is being done and more or less only by NGOs or that quite a lot is being done by the municipality but not enough. It is also mentioned by several participants that they do not know much about the municipal work and more information would be appreciated.

Executive Summary

This study is executed on assignment by Göteborgs Stad, Sociala Resursförvaltningen and aims to *examine the public opinion and the role of the media in public opinion on homelessness among the citizens of Gothenburg*. The organization is experiencing problems in their communicative work with the issue of homelessness and therefore need to get an overview of its audience (the public). The study however does not intend to produce generalizable results but to outline the different ways that the public might think about the subject of homelessness. These results later can be used to design a quantitative survey study to retrieve comparable and generalizable results.

The study has its base in a number of different theories. These theories mainly deal with PR, public opinion, media representation and social accountability. For example, the work of Gamson in *Talking Politics* (1992) and Iyengar in *Is Anyone Responsible? – How Television Frames Political Issues* (1991) is being discussed.

Empirically, the work of this study is qualitative and consists of four focus group interviews. The focus groups were conducted and moderated by the author and consisted of altogether 16 participants from four different areas of Gothenburg with a large variety of backgrounds concerning age, profession and education. The conversations were focused around four different themes which were represented by the research questions of this thesis. Moreover, the conversations also revealed background information about the participants such as age, occupation, education, place of residence, media consumption and social/political interest.

The results from the study are analysed with help from the ECA model and presented theme by theme and illustrated with representative quotes. These quotes are first presented in the interview language (Swedish) and directly after translated to English. All in all, it can be said that homelessness appears to be an issue that concerns the participants as it provokes strong sentiments and a lot of interest and opinions among the participants, yet it appears to be a non-issue. This as it does not seem to be a problem that they reflect much over when not confronted directly with it.

When it comes to how they define homelessness, the most prominent definition includes people who live on the streets, many times referred to as vagabonds, drug addicts, alcoholics and mentally ill individuals. This spontaneous definition however is also accompanied by a second definition where they also include people who have a place to stay but not an address of their own. This is more of a definition that the participants agree to that exists, but they do not spontaneously refer to this kind of homelessness when talking about homeless people.

The results also show that there are two main views on how the participants consider the work to fight homelessness in Gothenburg: One being that there is a significant amount done by the municipality but not enough. The other one being that there is very little done, and what is being done is primarily performed by NGOs such as Stadsmissionen or Räddningsmissionen. The information that the participants receive on homelessness and the work surrounding it is stated to mainly be from mass media sources. However, all participants think that the information is very poor. Furthermore, they would like more information from the municipality on their work.

To conclude, it can be said that homelessness seems to awaken a lot of sentiments and interest from the participants and they do appear to desire more information on the subject, especially from the municipality itself. However, I do believe that this interest should be considered with certain caution as their interest might appear greater in the interview situation than it actually is in reality. Furthermore, and this was also expressed by several participants, Göteborgs Stad needs to carefully consider how much effort and revenue should be invested on communicating their work on homelessness – the important thing is that the work is being done, not to tell people about it. The information that is being spread should intend to inform the citizens of their work, not to project a good image.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Assignment from Göteborgs Stad

In the city of Gothenburg, as in any other larger city in the world, there exists social problems such as drug abuse, unemployment and homelessness. The latter is often a consequence of the two other and a subject that is under regular debate. What should be done to fight homelessness? Who should do it? And so on and so forth. In Gothenburg the responsible official body for the work against homelessness is Sociala Resursförvaltningen, a part of Göteborgs Stad. Sociala Resursförvaltningen offers different kinds of social services and have a supporting function to the different boroughs of Gothenburg who are ultimately responsible for the welfare of the citizens of Gothenburg. In addition to support around homelessness, Sociala Resursförvaltningen also works with family issues and counselling, field work and drug abuse¹.

The subject of this thesis has been assigned by Sociala Resursförvaltningen at Göteborgs Stad, to help them in their work with homelessness in Gothenburg. As part of this project the organization has asked me to research how the people of Gothenburg perceive the concept of homelessness in Gothenburg. This in order to be able to communicate to the public better what is being done about homelessness in the city.

1.2 Current Official Definitions of Homelessness

This research aims, among other things, to examine how the public defines homelessness, and a likely outcome of this question is that people generally defines this as a person who sleeps on the streets or in shelters. However, there already exists official definitions of what homelessness is. Socialstyrelsen in 2005 performed a survey on homelessness in Sweden and here defined four different categories depending on housing situation:

1. 'Lacking housing' – A person who sleeps out doors or at shelters.

¹ <http://www.goteborg.se/wps/portal/socialresurs> Retrieved 2011.03.27 at 13.44. Last updated 2010.11.25

2. 'Lacking housing within three months' – A person who is an intern in a prison, rehabilitations unit or institution. This person will be discharged within three months and do not have housing after this.
3. 'Insecure housing' – A person who is staying in a rehabilitations unit, institution or other. This person will not be discharged within three months but do not have housing after a possible future discharge.
4. 'Housing without contract' – A person who stays temporarily with friends, family, relatives or have a temporary sub-let contract (shorter than three months). This person has due to his or her situation been seeking help at social services or similar organizations.²

1.3 What Is Being Done?

In 2009, the Swedish government formulated a strategy consisting of four goals to fight homelessness. These are as follows:

1. Everybody should be guaranteed roof over their head and offered organized and tailor made help.
2. The number of men and women who are admitted to prisons, rehabilitations units or institutions and do not have post care housing arranged shall decrease.
3. Entering to the ordinary housing market shall be made easier for women and men who are in housing supplied by social services and other similar organizations.
4. The number of evictions shall decrease and no children shall be evicted.

In the end, it is however the different councils in the country that are responsible for their citizens. In Gothenburg this means Göteborgs Stads Kommun. Göteborgs Kommun offers a number of different types of housing for people who are homeless. For example, there is an emergency housing that is offered to homeless adults who suffer from drug abuse and health problems. There is also a unit that seek up homeless people in the city to give help and support in an effort to have them change their situation and to direct them to emergency housing. All in all there are approximately 1100 housing spaces in Gothenburg. Most commonly the condition to

² Socialstyrelsen kartläggning av hemlöshet 2005

stay in this housing is to have a contact at social services who grants permission to stay there.³

There is also a number of NGOs that work against homelessness in Gothenburg. They can be said to work as a complement to the social services and are important to those who for different reason do not seek help from social services units. In Gothenburg these organizations are represented by Stadsmissionen, Räddningsmissionen, Frälsningsarmén, Franciscushjälpen and Baptistförsamlingen Café en Trappanér. Most NGOs who work with homelessness receive financial support from the council. However, some offer housing that do not receive financial support.

³ [http://www.goteborg.se/omsorg och stöd](http://www.goteborg.se/omsorg_och_stod), retrieved 2011.04.02 at 12.04. Last updated: information missing

2. ...and Why Is This Interesting?

The specific purpose of this thesis is of course primarily interesting to Göteborgs Stad, but it is also of public interest. The organization is financed by tax revenue and consequently it is of interest to the citizens of Gothenburg to receive information and knowledge about what work is being performed with this revenue. It is also concerning an issue (homelessness) which is relevant to society at large from a social perspective. Anything that can be done to improve this social situation - this research aiming to be part of it - is of interest to society.

As mentioned earlier, the study will be executed on assignment from an external organization, wherefore the focus of relevance will be shifted toward the purpose of this organization. However, as for the relevance of this issue to the academic world, I believe that from this perspective this research can too make an important contribution. Public opinion is a large and very significant part of media- and communication studies and although research is frequently performed on this area, there is always a need for further research. Furthermore, the results of this research might also be useful in other academic areas, for example sociology.

As researcher and author of this thesis, I consider it a challenge to make a contribution in the issue of homelessness and the communication of this issue to the public. I feel that this assignment is of real importance to the society, wherefore it also feels valuable and relevant to execute. My aspiration for this thesis is that it will be used in the on going project on homelessness within Göteborgs Stad, and also that it may be applied in the future in connection to similar issues or organizations.

2.1 My Theoretical Standpoint

Ultimately, the project which this thesis is performing its research for, primarily concerns PR, public opinion and media representations, why this theoretical basis for the study will mainly deal with these three topics. PR has for a long time, and still is some might argue, been seen as something rather dirty and a business who's aim is to

fool people and present a polished, retouched picture of reality. In some cases this might be true. Badly managed and used PR can, for example, be used to deceive customers in order to not decrease sales after a scandal or to present a falsely positive image of a public person or public body to increase popularity. However, PR does not necessarily have to represent negative aspects. On the contrary, PR can be an important part of democratic functions of society, especially when it regards public bodies such as governmental- or municipal bodies. In these examples, PR is a vital part of the democratic right of citizens to be well informed about the work of their elected representatives. PR is of course only a part of the democratic flow of information in these situations, but it is nevertheless important. With the above in mind, I will in this thesis work from the standpoint that this research first and foremost concern how to best put forward information to the public about the work being done by Göteborgs Stad regarding homelessness. However, I will also argue that it should be considered that any future actions involving PR on the work on homelessness should be democratically motivated. I.e. to expose the work of Göteborgs Stad in the media or in other arenas should serve the purpose of informing the citizens of Gothenburg but not be on expense of the work itself.

2.2 To Communicate You Need To Know Your Audience

In any form of communication, be it interpersonal or mass communication it is of importance to know the audience, the receiver of the message. You can of course communicate with someone that you do not know, but it is significantly easier to get your message across if you know a little of how that person thinks on beforehand. The same principle is used in strategic communication with larger groups of people, such as the public. However, within PR and strategic communication there are several different models of communication. The so called *adjustment model*, which is the one I will argue is the most suitable model to use for Göteborgs Stad, is the one that most resembles this perspective of strategic communication. I will here give a short explanation to the different models:

1. *The persuasion model*. Here the organization's goal is formulated without intervention from the communication officer. Only direct relations are considered in this

perspective.

2. *The adjustment model.* The goals of the organization are formed considering the attitudes, norm and values surrounding the organization. Here, the communication's officer have a key role, representing the organization.

3. *The publicity model.* The primary purpose is here to create media attention.⁴

Regarding the case of Göteborgs Stad and the public, I will argue that the second model should be applied. This as the primary function of Sociala Resursförvaltningen is a public body who's purpose is to serve the citizens. Hence, they ought to adjust according to the attitudes and values in their surroundings. The main goal with the PR and strategic communication for this organization should be to transmit an as correct and easily accessible information to the public as possible, not to gain attention in the press to increase popularity or profit. This is also specifically expressed in their communication plan⁵. However, for public organizations, such as Göteborgs Stad, strategic communication often concerns construction of media strategies that defend actions or statements. This as public bodies are financed by tax revenue and therefore are often scrutinized by journalists. Many PR strategies today work to secure the public view of the organization's policy, why it is sometimes viewed merely as a mean of persuasion of the public (see model 1, the persuasion model). The two-way symmetrical model on the other hand, means that the organization involves itself with the public to realise how the organization is perceived to later be able to assess communicative action should be executed and in what way. This is exactly what this thesis aims to do – to assess the standpoint of the public in the issue of homelessness, in order to plan the best way to communicate with it regarding this problem. For these reasons, this will also be the approach that this thesis and research will have.⁶

One of the most recognized theories on PR is that on *Tudelning* by James E. Grunig. According to this theory, PR is described as a choice between asymmetrical and symmetrical approach. Practical strategic communication is viewed as a negotiation between interests, publics and goals. Grunig defines four different publics who can be

⁴ Falkheimer et Heide, 2007

⁵ Sociala resursförvaltningen's communications plan

⁶ Weaver et al, 2006

seen as different stages in a process and defined by their level of engagement:

1. *Non-publics (are not affected by a problem)*
2. *Latent-publics (can have a high level of experience of the problem but lack engagement)*
3. *Aware publics (high level of problem experience and potential engagement)*
4. *Active publics (high level of problem experience and directly affected by the problem, strongly engaged)*

Here you can say that strategic communication is a way of steering relations to affect the organizations in question positively. How to do this depends on which of the four groups above the target group belongs to. Either the focus lies on direct contacts between people or it lies on the indirect communication through mass media. With direct contacts you can create a more symmetrical flow of communication, while with communication through mass media, you will create an asymmetrical flow of communication as this communication is more or less one way⁷ Regarding the public that is concerned in this thesis - the citizens of Gothenburg and journalists in relation to homelessness in Gothenburg, they can mainly be defined as a latent-public. This as most likely, the majority of the public are not directly affected by the problem (i.e. homelessness) but they are still aware of it as they see people on the streets selling the homelessness magazine (Faktum) etc but most are probably not engaged in any way, working with the issue. However, this thesis will examine this further and then be able to better assess what sort of public the communication plan should be addressed to.

⁷ Grunig, 1992

3. Public Opinion, Strategic Communication and Media

3.1 Public Opinion

How public opinion is created and maintained via mass medias has been under debate ever since the birth of our first medias. The research community has not yet been able to answer this question fully. However, the dominating theories have changed notably over the decades. While we began believing that media was more or less almighty, injecting its opinions in a public who uncritically absorbed any idea, this theory was later replaced by Paul Lazarsfeld's theory of a two-step flow of communication. This meant that media was thought to have the power to project its ideas only on certain parts of the public, so called *opinion leaders*. These opinion leaders then had the power to pass on these ideas to their surroundings⁸. Today the most prevalent media theories advocates that media does not have the power to control the public opinion. However, the power of media lies in that it can decide *what* the public has opinions about, i.e. what we think is important to discuss. This is also referred to as *the Agenda Setting Theory*⁹. What the media research community also is more or less agreeing on, is that media is powerful in the sense that it *re-presents* and *re-creates* ideas. This means that it gives power to already commonly accepted ideas, and consequently, excludes alternative ones. For example, it represents and recreates stereotypes in everything from news articles to fictional TV series.

In this particular case with the public opinion on homelessness, this should mean two things;

1. Whether or not the public find the issue with homelessness important or not, or how important and big of an issue it is, depends on how much emphasis is put on it in the media. I.e. if media puts homelessness on the agenda or not.
2. The image of homelessness among the public will be a reciprocal reflection of how media depicts homelessness and homeless people. This image will also be a

⁸ Lazarsfelt, 1944

⁹ eg McCombs, 2004

reflection on the general view of this matter in society, i.e. media recreates this already existing image.

In the article *Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality*, Gamson et al argues that the images that media create among its readers are a result of a number of different circumstances. They are affected by context, social location and prior experience of the reader. These circumstances can make the reader decode the same text (by text I here refer to all types of media content, including images) in a different way compared to another reader. Gamson here further argues that the decoding of media texts is also affected through conversations and contacts with fellow readers of the same text. Gamson also points this out in the book 'Talking Politics', where he analyzes the common notion that the general public is uninterested and uninformed about politics. He does this by performing analysis of discussions within groups of working-class people, covering subjects such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and nuclear power. In order to see how close the manner of talking about these issues among the groups of working-class people is to the way they are discussed in the media, he also analyzes media material on the same subjects. Through this research, Gamson concludes that the process of how the public creates an opinion is rather complex. People reflect over what they read and hear through media by filtering it through their own experiences and the experiences of people in their surroundings. Moreover, they also have a good ability of discussing their opinions with others.¹⁰

Gamson also points out that media is not an independent, objective mirror of reality, but rather far from it. As an example he describes the case of *Detroit News*: The editor of this organization told his staff to direct their news reporting at readers in their thirties, as they were earning quite a lot of money and therefore were good potential buyers of the products that their advertisers were selling. The important thing when choosing what news stories should be published was not to tell what was concerning Detroit and its citizens but what would be suitable topics to discuss at the readers' cocktail parties. With *Detroit News* as an example, Gamson argues that although the world and its happenings has become far more accessible to people all over the world

¹⁰ Gamson, 1992

through live television, Internet etcetera, this has at the same time resulted in an absence of depth to the knowledge and reporting of these happenings. The quality of news has deteriorated¹¹. In the book *Hemlöshet* (=Homelessness), Hans Swärd debates the issue of how media affects homelessness politics and the public opinion on this. According to this, the debate in the media has affected the opinion significantly and thereby also political decisions and measures. For example, according to Swärd, media attention was the reason the so called Statliga Hemlöshetskommittéen (=The State Homelessness Committée) was assembled. Furthermore, media attention is also claimed to have induced Socialstyrelsen's mapping of homelessness in Sweden.¹². These claims are in line with the earlier mentioned Agenda Setting Theory – what media says is important, the people think is important too.

Moreover, there has also been a master thesis written at the University of Gothenburg on the subject of media reporting on homelessness. The main results show that the media reporting is mainly focused on a political discussion where the responsibility for the problem and the solution to the problem is attributed to society. The study also shows that there are four different types of description characteristics of social problems in the media: Problem, Cause, Assessment and Solution. The most common one is the description of the problem and a rather small part focuses on some form of assessment of the problem. When cause is described the focus often lies on the difficulties for homeless people to fulfil the requirements to receive help.¹³. This seemingly narrow approach to reporting on homelessness may be connected to Gamson's theory of how the quality of news have deteriorated and lack depth.

Apart from the study by Karlsson, there has been another study performed on the subject of how media describes the phenomenon of homelessness in Gothenburg. Here, the researchers found that there are three different discourses in which homeless people are described in, of which the conventional *Trashank* (=Tramp) is the most common one. This stereotype describes a sort of rugged vagabond that would be the sort of homeless person that we see sleeping on the streets. The other two, less common, discourses are defined as *Offret* (=The Victim) and *Hon som är som vi* (=She who is like us). *Offret* is the homeless victim of unfortunate circumstances while the

¹¹ Gamson et al, 1992

¹² Swärd, 2008

¹³ Karlsson, 2010

Hon som är som vi is the person who is just like any other normal citizen but for some reason do not have her own residence.¹⁴

3.2 Stereotyping and Representation

Media uses stereotyping and projects a representation of reality when reporting on events. In the following paragraph I will explain further the work of media and its logic, so called media logic.

According to researcher Kristina Boréus, there exists a discrimination against minority (ethnicity) groups in the written language in the media. This discrimination is very closely connected to the usage of the concept of *'othering'*. *'Othering'* is considered to be a sort of mental distance that has been created between the two concepts of *'us'* and *'them'*. The *'us'* group is the one which is considered to be representing normality while the *'them'* group is differentiating and deviant. This does not have to be something negative, it can also be the case of exoticism where people from the *'them'* group are attributed as exciting and beautiful. I.e. they are considered different but not inferior. However, discrimination can be defined as the *'us'* group placing everybody else in one single group (them) and to say that these people are all the same. Boréus points out that it therefore is a person's membership in a group that makes him or her to be discriminated against, not that persons specific qualities¹⁵ This form of stigmatization does not necessarily only concern ethnic minorities but can also concern groups with stigmas such as homelessness.

3.2.1 Media Logic and Medialization

Media logic has been a debated concept ever since the 1970s when Snow and Alt Heide claimed that the media adapted its formats to the public in order to reach out to them more efficiently and that it hence also was in some ways responsible for the way the public viewed society¹⁶. What this theory in practice means, is that what becomes news has to fit the media mould in terms of format, the news organization in question, work conditions etc. According to media researcher Kent Asp, the concept

¹⁴ Alf, 2008

¹⁵ Boréus, 2006

¹⁶ Alt Heide et Snow, 1979

of media logic can be divided into four different parts:

- *Media format*
- *Routines*
- *Work methods*
- *Media dramaturgy*

The format need to fit the work methods of the media as the format is limited in the amount of space it is allowed and also in its function and purpose. Due to this, all news do not fit in all formats. For example, an event may be reported in the papers but not make the TV news due to lack of image material. Furthermore, *the routines* limit the way news can be and are reported, as these need to be complied to in order to follow a budget and also to adapt to, for example, technical and other practical limitations. Last but not least, there is *the media dramaturgy*, the way stories are told in the media. Just like in fictional novels or plays, dramaturgy in news telling is important in order to catch the audience interest, and therefore affects the way news organizations tell news¹⁷. This media dramaturgy has been researched by for example Gudmund Hernes and Jesper Strömbäck. They have defined five different techniques that media dramaturgy consists of; *polarization, intensifying, personifying, concretization and stereotyping*. *Polarization*, in this context means that news stories are told as conflicts with two different sides fighting each other in one way or another. This makes the whole situation more interesting to the audience and causes more attention. *Intensifying* refers to the choice of words that are used. Between the choice of two words, where one of them is more extreme or maybe even controversial, the latter has a greater chance of being used when it comes to telling news stories. *Personifying* in its turn, is used to make people relate to the news easier and therefore generate a larger interest among the audience. In practice, this means that news stories are related to individuals, preferably known suchs. The two last techniques, concretization and stereotyping, both aim to simplify the content to make it more accessible to the audience. *Concretization* makes abstract and complex issues more tangible and easier to understand, while *stereotyping* simplifies the world and makes it easier to relate to, as the audience recognizes these stereotypes. All in all this means that news stories are told as conflicts, intensified through choice of words,

¹⁷ Asp, 1990

related to individuals (especially known such), simplified and generalized¹⁸.

The way that media works, with its media logic, has consequently meant that if organizations, celebrities, politicians or others want to enter the media space, they need to adapt to this media logic. This in combination with the importance of media in today's society has resulted in medialization – adaption of society to the media. When it comes to public bodies, such as Göteborgs Stad, it can be discussed whether this is or can be potential problem or not. This reflection is important to bring in to this study as part of the purpose from Göteborgs Stad's side is to project an image of their work in the media. This aim can be seen as a result of this medialization.

Regarding the general perception and opinion on the specificity of homelessness among the public, there has been a couple of theses written on the subject. For example, there has been research done on what people think is the main reason why certain person become homeless. The most common result here was some form of mental illness¹⁹.

3.3 Media and The Depiction of Societal Responsibility

When it comes to the depiction of social problems in society in the media, the media effects professor Shanto Iyengar is one of the more acknowledged researchers. His research shows that people generally attributes problems in society to a responsible body, regardless if there is such a responsible body or not. In other words, a scapegoat is always found. In his book *Is Anyone Responsible*, he defines two different types of political responsibility - *causal responsibility* and *treatment responsibility*. The causal responsibility explains who is the cause of what has occurred, while the treatment responsibility explains who should take care of the consequences and solve the problem. According to Iyengar, responsibility for larger, more general problems such as poverty, when depicted in the media, is attributed to society as a political body. To explain the attribution of responsibility for problems in society, Iyengar presents four

¹⁸ Strömbäck 2000; Hernes 1978

¹⁹ Nilsson et Persson, 2001

different models:

Societal model – Here, the conditions of society cause the problem which can be solved by society itself.

Individualistic model - The individual is responsible for both the cause of and the solution to the problem.

Guardian model – In this model the individual is responsible for the cause but society is responsible for the solution.

Compensatory model - The society is responsible for the problem but because of the inadequacy of society the individual needs to compensate for this and take the responsibility to solve the problem him- or herself.

According to Iyengar's research, the dominating model for society problems such as poverty and unemployment when depicted in media, is the societal model. When reporting, media uses two different formats, according to Iyengar; an *episodic format* and a *thematic format*. The episodic format is event oriented and concretizing, while the thematic format is generalizing and emphasizes statistics. Out of these two, the episodic is the more common format of reporting. Iyengar argues that, according to his research, people's attributions of responsibility changes if you change the format in which it is reported. In other words, he argues that when using the episodic format, people tend not to hold public officials responsible for the societal problem that is being reported on. Both the responsibility for cause and solution of the problem is instead put on the individual. Furthermore, Iyengar also argues that there is a significant difference in interpretation of media reporting between different individuals. Some read media texts more critically due to cultural resources and experience. These people also often discuss their reading with other people and are therefore also affected by this in their interpretation of the text. Hence, the decoding process can be rather complex to understand²⁰. This thought is similar to that of Gamson.

²⁰ Iyengar 1991

3.4 All in All...

To conclude, it can be said PR, media and medialization appears to play an increasingly important role in all levels of society. It is inevitable for companies and other organizations to completely remain outside of this part of reality. Media seemingly has the power to set the agenda of what the public considers important and it can therefore, depending on the purpose of the organization, be vital to be part of this agenda or at least be aware on when and why you are on the agenda yourself.

4. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose and research questions are based on the problematization of this issue and are therefore as follows: The purpose of this study is *to examine the public opinion and the role of the media in the public opinion on homelessness among the citizens of Gothenburg*. This in order to be able to best communicate the work being done on homelessness to the public. The above described purpose contains several smaller parts. To cover the whole purpose, the following research questions will have to be answered:

1. *How do the people of Gothenburg define a homeless person?*
2. *What do the people of Gothenburg think is being done to fight homelessness? And who do they think is doing this?*
3. *What do the people of Gothenburg think should be done about homelessness?*
4. *Through what sources do the people of Gothenburg receive information on homelessness in Gothenburg?*

By finding the answers to these four questions the initial idea was to be able to also suggest suitable and effective ways of communicating to the public the work that is being performed regarding homelessness by Sociala Resursförvaltningen. However, due to the nature of the purpose of the research, it has been concluded that a two-step research is needed, where I will only perform the first half – a qualitative study. I will therefore settle on, from my results, suggest ways to perform the next step of the research – a quantitative study. Below the research questions are explained in more detail:

1. *How do the people of Gothenburg define a homeless person?*

Here, the aim is to examine what definitions the citizens of Gothenburg would give a homeless person. Who is considered homeless? A person living on the streets? Or is it enough to not have a flat/house of your own and rely on staying with friends or

relatives? This is important to find out to be able to, within the organization, communicate some sort of official definition of homelessness. To be able to communicate the work of the organization it is necessary that both the organization and the public are, so to speak, speaking the same language.

2. What do the people of Gothenburg think is being done to fight homelessness? And who do they think is doing this?

This question is important to answer as it is necessary for Göteborgs Stad to know how much the people of Gothenburg know about their work in order to find the best way of communicating this work to the public. Do people at all know that Göteborgs Stad and Sociala Resursförvaltningen is responsible in this matter? Do the public know that they are working with this problem? Or do they think that the work that is being done is performed by other organizations? As the situation is today, it is possible that the general public think that the only part of society that works against homelessness are the NGOs, which in that case can be a problem for Göteborgs Stad. We need to find out if this really is the case and from there elaborate a suitable way of reaching out with information about the work of Sociala Resursförvaltningen regarding homelessness.

3) What do the people of Gothenburg think should be done about homelessness?

Through this question the aim is to find out the general opinion on what should be done to fight homelessness. Does this image and idea fit with the current reality? If it is then this knowledge is an important tool in designing the communication plan for this work. If it isn't, then that knowledge will also be an important tool to communicate why this is not the case.

4. Through what sources do the people of Gothenburg get information on homelessness in Gothenburg?

By knowing where the public get their information about homelessness it gives us a good basis for future communications planning regarding this matter. If we do not know where the public seeks information, we do not know where to reach them with our messages. For this reason , this question is maybe the most important one to find an answer to. Depending on what answers we get here, it will affect the entire communication plan on work with homelessness.

5. Method

5.1 Choice of Method

To be able to answer the research questions stated above, I have chosen the qualitative method of focus groups. Focus groups allows for analysis of how the participants together reason about a certain phenomena or issue. This gives a deeper understanding of values, structures behind thoughts and attitudes regarding certain subjects that are brought up in the conversation ²¹ Considering the purpose and research questions of this thesis this serves its purpose well. Ideally, the focus groups are combined with other methods, such as a quantitative survey, but due to restricted time for the execution of this thesis, this will not be possible. It is however a suggestion, if this study is to be taken forward in the future, that this qualitative study is combined with a quantitative study such as a survey. Currently, the plan for Sociala Resursförvaltningen is to use the results from this study as a basis for a survey on homelessness in the Autumn of 2011. The results from this thesis will then be useful in constructing relevant and valid survey questions (and answering alternatives).

5.2 Selection of The Focus Groups

When the focus groups were selected the intention was to achieve variation in ages, geographic location (where the participants had their residence within Gothenburg), educational- professional- and socioeconomic backgrounds. This goal was not entirely reached, but there was still a good variation in the representation. The groups consisted of people in the age range between 29 to 59, with people from three different countries residing in four different areas of Gothenburg – centre, east, northeast suburban and northwest suburban. Furthermore, there was a good variation in educational and professional backgrounds as there were participants with very different occupations – everything from electricians and sales assistants to engineers, physical therapists and project managers. This also meant that there was a variety of education levels that ranged from upper secondary school to master degrees. Ideally, there would also have been participants from lower age groups to represent youths and also older to represent pensioners. However, this was not possible due to

²¹ Esaiasson et al, 2009

insufficient time to recruit participants from these age groups. Ideally, a larger socioeconomic variety would have been desirable. As all groups were recruited through acquaintances we did not reach any participants that lived in areas that can be considered working class suburban or similar. All in all, I believe that we still achieved groups with a satisfying variation of participants. Furthermore, the aim of this study is not to generalize the results but to identify different ways of thinking on homelessness, why it is not as important to have a representative range of participants as in a survey.

When the groups were assembled, it was also taken into consideration that the groups should have intrapersonal or interpersonal factors in common to create a good group chemistry. I.e. that the participants in one group need to have at least one thing in common in order to feel comfortable conversing with each other²². To meet these needs one group had a work related connection, one had friends in common and the two last ones were neighbours.

5.3 Choice of Themes and Conduction of the Focus Group Conversations

The themes for the focus groups were constructed on beforehand and were based on the research questions for this thesis:

- 1. How do the people of Gothenburg define a homeless person?*
- 2. What do the people of Gothenburg think is being done to fight homelessness? And who do they think is doing this?*
- 3. What do the people of Gothenburg think should be done about homelessness?*
- 4. Through what sources do the people of Gothenburg information on homelessness in Gothenburg?*

Consequently, the themes concerned views on *homelessness and homeless people, work that is being done to fight homelessness, the adequacy of this work, social responsibility and sources of information on homelessness*. To get a better overview and background to these views, questions were also asked which concerned media

²² Wibeck (2000)

consumption, political interest, educational- and professional backgrounds, age etc. When the questions were asked, care was taken to arrange them in an order that was suitable. I.e. the interviews started with the participants telling a little about their backgrounds as this is a simple 'question' to answer and often makes the participants relax and feel comfortable. The end of the interviews were also finished with simpler questions such as media consumption to make the participants feel that the interview was coming to an end. Before the interviews the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the conduction of the focus group interview (including that they would be sound recorded) and that they would be anonymous in the publication of the results from the interviews.

As for the physicalities of the interviews, they were all conducted in home environments where the participants had been previously and they were intended to make the participants to feel relaxed and at ease. I, as the moderator, placed myself in a neutral position in the group (not at the short side of the table) while conducting the focus groups. This not to seem too authoritarian²³.

5.4 Analysis of The Focus Groups

To be able to properly analyse the results from the recorded focus group interviews all material was transcribed from the recordings. All transcriptions were finished before the analysis was started in order to, as far as possible, avoid getting too much of a pre decided idea of what the results would be and what patterns might be discovered before all the transcription was done. However, it is of course inevitable not to subconsciously analyze little by little in the back of your mind.

When all the interviews were transcribed their content was categorized in protocols (one for each focus group) according to the ECA (Ethnographic Content Analysis) method. This made it easier to see patterns and connections in the results. These patterns and connections were analysed and illustrated in the analysis by a number of representative quotes for each from the participants for each theme of the study. ECA

²³ Wibeck 2000

is a qualitative content analysis method that allows for discovery and mapping of a phenomena which suits the purpose of this study well.²⁴

In all form of social science research so called *theoretical saturation* is discussed. This means that every study, to be considered reliable, needs to have reached an amount of empirical material where it is not necessary or even fruitful to gather more material because there are no new results appearing. In the case of this study, it appeared as if this saturation was reached rather early in the material gathering process. After the first two focus group session no new results were really discovered. The thoughts and opinion of the different participants repeated themselves and I therefore dare to say that this study has reached a satisfying level of theoretical saturation. However, albeit it has been stated that the variety of different participants have been good, it should be mentioned that one group of citizens is missing – the homeless themselves. If members of this group had participated in the study it is possible, if not likely, that this would have added new results. Still, this group is not the target group in the type of public communication from Göteborgs Stad which this study examines. Therefore, the absence of this group should not be viewed as problematic.

²⁴ Wibeck 2000

6. Results and Analysis

In this chapter the results from the four focus group interviews will be presented. The results are analyzed and presented theme by theme and illustrated with quotes from the participants. I have quoted the participants in the original interview language (i.e. Swedish). Directly after each quote follows a translation of the quote in English. The participants are quoted under false names as not to reveal their identities.. Below is a box with basic information about the participants:

Name	Age	Occupation
Lisa	43	Hotel Manager
Margareta	63	Social Worker
Linda	37	Office Manager
Maria	35	Working in the car industry
Carina	40	Photographer and Personal Assistant
Kristina	55	Shop Manager
Olov	55	Electrician
Therese	30	Sales Assistant
Julia	29	Sales assistant
Hans	59	Physiotherapist
Kennet	41	Marketing Director
Anders	38	Business owner
Alexander	35	Computer Engineer
Johan	36	Computer Engineer
Olle	36	Civil Engineer
Erika	38	Civil Engineer

6.1. How do the participants define a homeless person?

This theme represents the first research question of this study and explains the different ways the participants define homelessness.

Addicts, mentally ill and vagabonds...but I guess it could happen to anyone

All participants appear to have rather strong sentiments when the issue of homelessness is being brought up. It upsets and disturbs. However, homelessness at the same time seems to be an issue that most people do not reflect much over in their everyday lives. It is a distant non-question that only awakens attention in instants of direct confrontation. This is reflected in their way of, when *consciously* thinking of the concept of homelessness, stating that any one could become homeless, regardless of back ground and social status. It is just a matter of bad fortune:

"Jag tror att vi förknippar, var till mans, hemlöshet med människor som är kriminella, missbruk, ..men det behöver inte alls vara så. Du kan ha ett jobb, bo nånstans fast du inte äger..du har inte varken äganderätt eller hyresrätt eller..man kan var en skötsam person ändå." (Hans)

(I think that we all connect homelessness with people who are criminals, addicts...but it doesn't have to be like that at all. You can have a job, live somewhere although you don't own...you don't have ownership or a rental contract or...you can still be a tidy person.)

"(...)det är inte så svårt. Man hamnar där alltså. Även om man tycker att det låter konstigt, men man kan förstå det...för det är ingen som tror att det ska bli så. Det finns dom som väljer hemlöshet eller av andra orsaker.....men det finns ju helt vanliga människor som plötsigt hamnar där." (Carina)

((...) it's not that difficult. You end up there. Even if you think it sounds strange, but it's understandable...because nobody thinks that it's gonna end up like that. There are **those who** chose homelessness or because of other reasons...but there are also ordinary people who suddenly end up there.)

The participants' tendency to have rather strong opinions about homelessness, but not appearing to have given the issue much thought before being asked as participants in this study renders them what Weaver et al would refer to as a *Latent*- (can have a high level of experience of the problem but lack engagement) or possibly, *Aware Public* (high level of problem experience and potential engagement).²⁵

²⁵ Weaver et al, 2006

However, when spontaneously returning in the conversations to who the homeless person is, every participant, without exception, distance themselves from homelessness by referring to homeless people as drug addicts, mentally ill, vagabonds and alcoholics:

"De ligger på bänkarna vid Nils Eriksson terminalen. Det är ju bara en liten grupp, men det finns ju över hela stan. Men man pratar inte mycket om hemlösa." (Hans)

(They lay on the benches at the Nils Erikson Terminal. They're only a small group, but they exist all over the city. But you don't speak much of homeless people)

"De passar inte in i systemet. Det.. det tycker jag man hör mycket...alla dom som inte...det kanske inte handlar om dom som...att dom egentligen har valt att vara hemlösa men snarare..de är för kantiga för konstiga för...de passar inte in." (Carina)

(They don't fit in the system. I...I think you hear that a lot...all those who don't...maybe it's not about those who...that they really chose to be homeless but more..that they are too square and odd to..they don't fit in)

This behaviour of subconsciously distancing themselves from the homeless might be explained by psychology theories on self-preservation due to fear of becoming one of these people. However, it can also be related to the concept of *othering*. As explained earlier in the theory chapter of this thesis, othering means that a mental distance is created between 'us' and 'them'. The *us* here being the people with orderly lives and a proper home to come to and the *them* being the homeless. By creating, or holding on to, this image of the homeless person as someone far from their own persona, the participants of the focus groups may form a distance from the issue of homelessness which can render them, as mentioned above, a latent public with lesser engagement.

Homeless people are people on the street with no place to go

Although all participants talked about homeless people as addicts and/or vagabonds when spontaneously referring to this group of people, they also brought forward more specific definitions of who should be considered homeless when being asked more directly how they define homelessness. One of the ways to define a homeless person by the participants was *somebody who sleeps on the streets or in shelters*, which connects to the image of drug addicts, alcoholics and vagabonds. This also seemed to be the more 'spontaneous' definition, i.e. what people referred to when not thinking too much about whether they were right or wrong in their definition:

"Ja precis, tanten med shoppingvagnen och alla flaskorna och ja..ja hon..mmm..hennes tänker jag på"
(Kristina)

(Yes, exactly, the lady with the shopping bag and all the bottles and yes...yes she...mm...I think of her.)

"De fanns när jag växte upp i Majorna. De hittade man i Sjöberga. De låg där...fullegubbar ...så att det har alltid funnits" (Margareta)

(They existed when I grew up in Majorna. You found them in Sjöberga. They were lying there...old drunks...so they've always existed)

"När jag tänker på hemlösa så kanske jag tänker mest på missbrukare och psykiskt störda som...som förmodligen aldrig kommer att kunna passa in i ett boende liksom. Och inte vill liksom bo...om någon annan måste bestämma att de får inte dricka eller vad det nu skulle vara då" (Johan)

(When I think of homeless I might think mostly of addicts and mentally disturbed who...who probably never will fit in a housing kind of. And don't want to live..if anybody else needs to decide that they can't drink or whatever it would be)

This way of defining a homeless person was the most prominent and dominating one and tended to be the first definition that was brought up. Still, most participants also had a wider definition when thinking through the question more thoroughly (see below). A few participants – all men – however stuck with their first definition and considered homeless people only to be people on the streets or staying in shelters. Whether or not it was a coincidence that these two participants were men and not women, I do not dare to say. It might imply that men have a stronger tendency to lean toward a more narrow definition, but this might also be chance. The definition is very similar to, and confirms, the 'Trashank' media description of certain homeless that Alf reveals in her thesis *'Trashanken, Offret och Hon som är som vi'*. The Trashank (=Tramp), according to Alf, is the dominating discourse in news media when reporting on homeless people, i.e. they are mostly described as some form of poor, miserable vagabond..²⁶ The fact that this also is the dominating view among the participants of this study might be a further indication that, just as Gamson, Swärd and several others claim, media affects the public image of homelessness.²⁷ Furthermore, it can be related to Karlsson's results where much the media reporting on homelessness seems to focus on the problem, not the solutions or any assessment of the problem.

²⁶ Alf 2008

²⁷ Gamson 1991; Swärd 2008

You have no address of your own...you depend on other people

This second definition that most participants made of a homeless person is a significantly wider definition, where *anyone who does not have an address of their own* can be considered homeless. This includes people staying with friends or family and people living in contract less (i.e. black market-)sub letted apartments. In other words, someone who depends on others to have a place to stay:

"Jag tänker ju på ett vidare begrepp än dom man ser sälja Faktum. Det finns ju väldigt många tycker jag som man stöter på som går från kompissoffan til mammaboendet till exempel" (Margareta)

(I'm thinking of a wider concept than those who are selling Faktum. There are many that you meet who go from a friend's couch to staying with mum for example)

"Där ha rman ju en ungdomhemlöshet just på grund av att det inte finns bostäder till alla. Dom har ju heller inte...anser jag är hemlösa för de kanske inte vill bo hos sina föräldrar längre och kanske bor hos bekanta, då har man inte heller ett hem" (Erika)

(There you have a youth homelessness due to the fact that there isn't sufficient housing for everybody. They don't have...I think they're homeless because they might not want to stay with their parents anymore and might live with friends, then you don't have a home either)

This definition is very similar to the fourth official definition of homelessness, i.e. *'Housing without contract'* (person who stays temporarily with friends, family, relatives or have a temporary sub-let contract shorter than three months. This person has due to his or her situation been seeking help at social services or similar organizations). As mentioned earlier, among the participants, this definition occurs more in instants when they reflect more consciously over how a homeless person can be defined. When referring spontaneously to a homeless person, people with sublet contracts or people staying with family or friends are not mentioned. In these cases the homeless people are solely represented by people living on the streets, i.e. the first official definition -*'Lacking housing'* (person who sleeps out doors or at shelters). The remaining two official definitions *'Lacking housing within three months'* (person who is an intern in a prison, rehabilitations unit or institution. This person will be discharged within three months and do not have housing after this) and *'Insecure housing'* (person who is staying in a rehabilitations unit, institution or other. This person will not

be discharged within three months but do not have housing after a possible future discharge). do are not mentioned by the participants as homeless people.

6.2 What do the participants think is being done to fight homelessness in Gothenburg?

In this theme, the participants present two main views: that a lot is being done to fight homelessness but not enough, and that very little is being done and more or less only by NGOs. Overall, the dominating view is that of a lot being done but not enough:

I think a lot is being done, but not enough

Here, the participants refer to the municipality (i.e. Göteborgs Stad) when talking about what is being done or not. Issues of a slow working organization, waste of money in administration and renting of private housing for homeless is mentioned as negative aspects of the municipal work on homelessness:

"Jag tror man jobbar ganska bra med det. Jag tror man jobbar mycket med frågan. För om man går tillbaka några år så tog ju inte samhället, kommunen nåt stort ansvar för de här människorna. Jag menar man kan ju titta på alla boenden som finns ändå. Jag menar om man tittar på dom Alltbo, Rebo och vad dom nu heter så är det kommunen som köper de här platserna för de här människorna. Så visst gör de en jäkla massa sen kunde man säkert göra mycket mer" (Olov)

(I think that they're working pretty well with it. I think they're working a lot with this issue. Because, if you go back a few years the society, the municipality didn't take any big responsibility for these people. I mean, you can look at all the housing there is. I mean, if you look at Alltbo, Rebo and whatever they're called, it's the municipality that buys these places for these people. So sure they do a hell of a lot but I'm sure that they could do more)

"Samhället har ju sina institutioner. Socialen. Men jag..kan tänka mig att de har tuffa tegler. Sen måste ju de människor som vänder sig till socialen ..socialen hjälper dem ju bara med det nödvändiga, med det mest basala. Jag tror att Göteborgs kommun gör för lite för dom. Tror det är en högst eftersatt grupp. De får finnas men inget mer. Man tjänar inga pengar på dom förstås, de kostar bara." (Hans)

(Well, the society has its institutions. The social services. But I...I can imagine that they have tough regulations. And the people who turn to the social services...the social services only help them with necessities, with the most basic things I think that Göteborgs Kommun do too little for them I think it's a highly group. They can exist but nothing more. You don't make any money from them obviously, they just cost money .)

"Jag upplever att mycket av det som kommunen gör, och jag tror att de gör en massa, det försvinner i den här uppköpnings...nästan kohandeln med allting. Ibland köper ju kommunen av sig själv! Det liksom går runt. Jag tror mycket går förlorat där. Jag tror inte att det är fel på viljan." (Lisa)

(I feel that a lot of what the municipality does, and I think they do a lot, it disappears in this purchasing...almost bargaining with everything. Sometimes the municipality even buys from itself! It kind of goes around...I think a lot is lost there. I don't think there's anything wrong with the will)

It should also be noted that this, in a way still positive notion, that Göteborgs Stad is doing quite a lot albeit not enough is often mixed with the notion that what is not being done is left to NGOs to fend for. A common critique that is being put forward is that official bodies such as the municipality of Göteborgs Stad do not 'dare' to take actions such as feeding people on the streets or giving them temporary shelter. This due to fear of admitting to their own failure to take care of its citizens as they then acknowledges the fact that these people on the streets really exists. One example of this is the following quote from a conversation about that the municipality should offer acute food and shelter:

"..frågan är väl om det är accepterat att en stat skulle ha den typen av tjänst. Det skulle på ett sätt vara att instifta den typen av bottennivå...att ge mat för dan och så. Då har man ju på nåt sätt accepterat sitt egna misslyckande se till att alla medborgare har en bra levnadsstandard" (Anders)

(...the question is if it's accepted that a state would offer that kind of service. It would in a way be to institute that sort of bottom level...to provide food for the day and these things. Then you in some way have accepted your own failure to make sure all citizens have a good standard of living.)

Very little is being done. And what is being done is mainly performed by NGOs

The second, less common but still spread among the participants, view that is presented is that there is very little done to fight homelessness, and what is being done is mainly done by NGOs, such as Stadsmissionen, Frälsningsarmén and others:

"Jag har fått uppfattningen att väldigt mycket av det som..härbärgen. Det är ju inte statligt eller kommunalt finansierade verksamheter utan det är ju verksamheter som drivs av Frälsningsarmén...eller andra typer av frivillighetsorganisationer. Och det är ju egentligen ganska illa att vi närmar oss en amerikansk situation där staten inte kan hjälpa sina medborgare utan där man måste söka finansiering från privata håll." (Kennet)

(I have the feeling that a lot of what...shelters..They're not financed by the government or the municipality but they are organizations that are run by The Salvation army and other types of NGOs.. And really, it is pretty bad that we are coming closer to an American situation where that state isn't able to help its citizens but where you have to seek private funding.)

"...och varför finns det välgörenhetsorg? Samhället räcker inte till!" (Hans)

(...and why are there NGOs? The society is not enough!)

"För dom som omfattas av socialförsäkring så finns det väl en del boende som finansieras av kommunen. Men då är det ju dom som kommunen betalar rätt mycket pengar för. Det är inte det mest effektiva. Min uppfattning är att det finns mer stöd privat." (Kennet)

(For those who are covered by the social security insurance I'm sure there are some housing financed by the municipality. But then it's the ones that the municipality pays quite a lot of money for. It's not the most efficient. My feeling is that there's more private support.)

"Ja, jag tror ju precis som du säger nånstans att samhället har misslyckats. För ofta, jag får utgå från nyheter och program på tv, då vet ju ofta polisen och socialarbetare vilka de här personerna är fast det görs inte nåt åt det från den sidan direkt. Utan du måste gå via Statsmissionen och liknande för att få tak över huvet under vintern." (Hans)

(Yes, I believe that just like you say, the society somewhere has failed. Because often, I have to refer to news and programs on TV, the police and social workers know who these people are but nothing is done about it from that side really. You have to go to Stadsmissionen or others to get a roof over your head during the winter.)

"Nu är det ju väldigt mycket upp till privata organisationer också. Och det är väl inget fel tycker jag att de finns, men..Statsmissionen till exempel då...det är jättebra, definitivt, men på nåt sätt så känns det som att det är nånting som vi som ett samhälle är ansvariga för. Det borde inte behövs att man har en privat institution som sköter det här. De gör att jättebra jobb men det känns som att samhället har misslyckats eftersom de behöver finnas där." (Johan)

(Now it's very much up to private organizations as well. And there's nothing wrong with them existing I think but...for example Statsmissionen..it's great, definitely, but somehow it feels as if it is something that we as a society are responsible for. It shouldn't be necessary to have a private institution that deals with this. They're doing a great job but it feels as if society has failed since they have to be there.)

The occurrence of this view can possibly, partly, be explained by the fact that most participants primarily think of homeless people as vagabonds and addicts living on the streets. This might mean that they do not instantly reflect over people who are receiving social welfare and have a flat or other type of housing paid by the municipality. Therefore, they think of more acute forms of aid such as food and shelter for the day and consequently refer to NGOs such as Statsmissionen. It may be noted that the quotes representing this view are all from male participants. However, I would, just as with the trashcan definition, not persevere in saying that there is a gender explained connection. There are females representing this view too. I simply chose these quotes to illustrate the view because they were the most clear and straight forward ones and they happened to be stated by male participants.

6.3 What do the participants think should be done about homelessness and who should do it?

When it comes to the theme of responsibility for the problem of homelessness, the most prominent views among the participants indicated that society was the responsible body, both for the cause of homelessness and for solving the problem:

The society is responsible both for making people homeless and for taking them out of this situation

As causes of homelessness, issues such as the so called Psykiatireformen (Mental Care Reformation) in the mid 90s where a lot of people with mental problems were discharged from mental institutions to live more or less on their own²⁸, and the shortage of rental housing in Gothenburg were frequently brought up in all four groups. As solutions to the problem of homelessness, measures such as changed regulations on the property market and larger fundings to mental- and rehabilitation care units and long term aid for homeless people were brought up:

"Ansvaret tycker jag borde ligga på kommunal basis. Jag tycker att det borde vara nånting som inte kyrkan och frivilligorganisationer ska vara inblandade i. Det blir så jättekonstigt, det..det liksom, då är det allmosor..! och det är förbaska mig inte...det är en mänsklig rättighet att ha tak över huvudet. Det ska liksom inte va nån som ska ge mig nån allmosa för att jag ska ha det. Det måste vara en av de mest grundläggande sakerna för människor att få kunna gå in och ha en säng liksom." (Kristina)

(The responsibility I think should be within the municipality. I think it shouldn't be something that the church or NGOs are involved in. It turns out so strange, it...it kind of is alms...and actually...it's a human right to have a roof over your head. It's not supposed to be someone giving me charity for me to have that. It must be one of the most fundamental things for people to be able to go inside and have a bed)

Looking at responsibility for homelessness from this perspective can be related to Lyengar and his *societal model*, i.e. that the conditions of society causes the homelessness and that society therefore holds both the causal - and the treatment responsibility for this situation.

Individuals are responsible for becoming homeless but it's society's responsibility to help them get out of the situation

A couple of participants were more individualistic in their view of responsibility, but only regarding the responsibility for causing the homelessness. They still considered it society's duty to solve the problem once it occurred:

"...då har du kanske inte riktigt spelat spelets regler om man säger. Så ett visst mått av, du får skylla dig själv finns nog faktiskt med i min bild av en hemlös då. Rätt eler fel, men det är min uppfattning." (Anders)

(...maybe you haven't really played according to the rules of the game so to speak. So, a certain amount of you've got to blame yourself I think is part of my image of a homeless person. Right or wrong, but that's my point of view.)

²⁸ <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/publikationer1999/1999-15-1> Retrieved: 12.05.11 kl. 12.50. Last updated: information missing.

"Jag tror och tänker ju att vi bor i Sverige och att de som vill och behöver hjälp får den. Papperslösa flyktingar är en annan kategori men jag tänker på...jag tror ändå det, att de erbjuds nånting men att de inte klarar av det då heller." (Nina, speaking of what sort of person who ends up in homelessness)

(I believe and think that we live in Sweden and that those who want and need help gets it. Paperless refugees is another category but I'm thinking of...I still believe that, that they are offered something but that they can't handle it still.)

If we return to Iyengar's responsibility models once again, this standpoint can be related to that of Iyengar's *Guardian Model*, i.e. that the individuals are responsible for being in the situation that they are in but that it is society's responsibility to help them. Hence, regardless of if the problem is viewed through the guardian model or the societal model, the participants agree that it is still society's responsibility to solve the problem and offer help to the homeless. Once again this may be related to the media image and media reporting on homelessness. In Karlsson research on Gothenburg news press, both the causal and treatment responsibility for homelessness tends to be attributed to society in the press. It is therefore possible that this 'responsibility accountability' view that the participants seem to have is tainted by the media reporting.

6.4 Through what sources do the participants receive information on homelessness in Gothenburg?

All participants were unanimous in one aspect of the question of where they received information about homelessness – the scarce amount of media attention to the subject. It was a widely debated issue that the attention to homelessness and homeless people is very limited.

You hear very little about homelessness in the media

Many participants focused on the notion that very little attention is being given to homelessness in the media, and seemed to see it as if the media ought to have a responsibility to report more about this subject, for example:

"Jag kan ju inte minnas satt man hört nån som upprört sig i media över den här gruppen. Enda gången nån upprör sig är ju när nån av de här galningarna har slått slint och blivit ihjällyxad och liknade då..annars är det ingen som pratar om den här gruppen." (Anders)

(I cannot recall that I've ever heard anyone getting upset in the media over this group of people. The only time anybody gets upset is when one of these lunatics have flipped and been axed to death and such things...other than that nobody speaks of this group)

However, it is here worth mentioning that only a few days before the conduction of the two latter focus groups, there was a one page article on homelessness in the largest news paper in Gothenburg – Göteborgs Posten. This article was not mentioned or referred to in the focus groups. This despite the fact that most participants stated that they read GP (Göteborgs Posten) on a regular basis. Such an incident might indicate that the apparent interest and desire for further information and attention to homelessness in the press (and other forums) is slightly magnified, so to speak, during the interview situation itself but not as much so in normal life.

I don't hear much, but what I hear I get through the media

Yet, when actually talking about where they *do* get information about homelessness, all participants (except one or two who have professional connections to social work) still referred to the media as their main source:

"Ja, jo men det är TV och till en väldigt liten del tycker jag, tidningar. Det tas inte upp tycker jag på det sättet. Jag vet inte om det, skapar väl inga läsare kanske jag vet inte. Det är om det är nån barnfamilj eller nåt sånt här som råkar illa ut, då kan man liksom höra om det." (Kristina)

(Yes, well it's TV and, to a very small part I think, news papers. It's not brought up I think in that way. I don't know if it doesn't generate readers, I don't know. It's if there's a family with children or something that's in trouble, then you might hear of it)

This indicates that the participants have very little personal experience of homelessness and homeless people themselves. There appears to be rather few, if any, sources outside media from which they do experience the issue, except the visual impressions of homeless people on the streets. This lack of personal experience can explain the rather similar view on homelessness; the responsibility and the definitions, between the participants and that of the press. According to Gamson people's opinion is affected through media but also filtered through their own experience and conversations with others. As most participants in these four focus groups do not have personal experience on the subject, it is more likely that their view will not differ much from that of the media.

You hear very little and you should hear more about what the municipality does to fight it

When discussing sources of information about homelessness the groups also discussed the information about the work that is being performed by the municipality regarding this issue. A common view was that it is difficult to know what Göteborgs Stad is actually doing in their work with this question and that it would be appreciated if they would be more transparent in their work to the public. However, it was also

emphasized by some participants that putting out this information should not take too much time, effort or funding from the actual work itself:

"Jag tycker det skulle vara intressant att se vad har Göteborg för politik eller handlingsplan vad det gäller hemlösa? Jag hör aldrig nåt sånt." (Hans)

(I think it would be interesting to see what kind of politics or action plan Gothenburg has when it comes to homeless? I never hear anything like that)

"Man vil ju veta vad som händer i stan och hur det fungerar och såna saker. Alla såna här frågot är ju intressanta. Det är ju ändå en samhällsfråga liksom. Sen så...om inte det säljer lösnummer så kanske...vi får ju ändå hem en massa andra tidningar som Centrum och såna där lokaltidningar...då kan man ju ta upp det lite mer där." (Johan)

(You want to know what is going on in the city and how it works and those things all these questions are interesting.. I mean, it is still a social issue. Then...if it doesn't sell single copies then maybe...we still receive a bunch of other papers like Centrum and those local papers...maybe they could bring some of this up there)

"...bara de inte går ut med gigantiska fina annonskampanjer som Göteborgss El gör här nu med hur duktiga de är! Och man vet att de läggs miljoner på plakat alltså." (Lisa)

(...as long as they don't publish giant, fancy advertising campaigns like Göteborgs El is doing about how good they are! And you know that they pay millions for posters that it)

"Det är väl en viktig del av att...i så fall påverka den bild som jag och andra har av kommunens arbete. Om man gör nånting så behöver man kanske komma ut och tala om det också. Men framför allt att inte tala om utan att göra. Det är ju ännu intressantare. För att trycka upp en broschyr som talar om att oh, vi gör det här...utan att använda dom pengarna till att faktiskt gör nåt." (Kennet)

(It's an important part of...in that case affect the image that I and others have of the work of the municipality. If you do something you might need to get out there and tell people about it too. But above all not to talk about it but to actually do. That's even more interesting. To print a brochure that says that oh, we are doing this...but to use that money to actually do something.)

These statements I believe are very important to pay attention to. In this thesis it has been emphasized from the onset that any strategic planning on the subject of homelessness (or any other work of the municipality) needs to serve a democratic purpose. The fact that several participants spontaneously also point out that any form of campaign which requires a larger amount of funding, and hence removes funding from the actual work itself, would be considered a waste of money is remarkable and should not be ignored.

6.5 To Sum Up...

In these final paragraphs I will sum up the above results from the analysis of the focus groups and attempt to further explain and relate these results.

In short, it can be said that homelessness appears to be an issue that concerns the participants and provokes strong sentiments and opinions. However, at the same time it seems to be somewhat of a non-issue. I.e. it is not a problem which people reflect much over spontaneously but a topic that mainly concerns when being confronted with it directly (as during these focus groups).

Moreover, the participants have two definitions of homelessness, of which one appears to be more spontaneous and the other definition which they make when more consciously thinking over the concept of homelessness. The spontaneous definition refers to someone who sleeps on the streets or in shelters and is often viewed as a drug addict, alcoholic or mentally ill person. The second definition also includes people who have a place to stay but who depends on other people for this accommodation. E.g. somebody who stays with friends or family and do not have an address of their own. However, this type of homelessness is never referred to while spontaneously speaking of homeless people.

From the results we can also see that there are two main views on how the participants look at what is being done to fight homelessness in Gothenburg: that there is rather a lot done by the municipality but not enough, or that there is very little done, and what is being done is mainly performed by NGOs. The latter view could be considered a problem for Göteborgs Stad, as the knowledge and awareness of their work is rather low within this view. This will be discussed later in the discussion chapter.

Regarding sources of information on homelessness in Gothenburg, the participants mainly refer to different types of mass media (mainly TV). However, all participants bring forward the view that, in general, there is very little attention given to this issue in the media, especially the news paper media. It is also mentioned several times that an increased flow of information to the public on the work performed by Göteborgs Stad is sought after. Many participants state that they do not know what the municipality is doing to fight homelessness but that they would like to know more.

Many of the results of this study can be related to the results from Karlsson's (2010) thesis on how the media depicts homelessness. As mentioned earlier, it is here shown that a large portion of the media attention on homelessness is given to the problem itself, not so much to any type of constructive suggestions or assessments. When the causes of homelessness is being discussed in the media it is common to report on the difficulties to receive help and to be eligible to receive this help from the authorities. For example, the psychiatric reform is frequently brought up in the media, just as by the participants in this study. Hence, the media image might have affected (as stated by Swärd²⁹) the focus group participants view on the homelessness issue. Furthermore, according to Karlsson, the media reporting tend to attribute the responsibility of homelessness (both causal and treatment) to the society, just like the participants of this study.

Within this analysis there has, as seen in some examples above, been an attempt made to detect possible patterns in opinions that may be related to each other. For example, do people with a certain background have certain opinions? Are views on one question connected to views on another questions? As Gamson states that the processing of media images is often affected and transformed through conversations with other³⁰, I looked for tendencies amongst the participants answers to see if participants with a higher political interest who frequently discuss social problems and politics would have similar ideas. However, no such connections have been discovered. Neither does there seem to be a connection between genders, place of residence, age, media consumption and certain views. Nor can any patterns be seen between opinions on one question and views on another.

²⁹ Swärd 1998

³⁰ Gamson 1991

7. Discussion and Practical Suggestions for Göteborgs Stad

7.1 About the Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the public opinion and the roll of the media in the public opinion on homelessness among the citizens of Gothenburg. So, have this purpose been fulfilled? Through my own assessment as the author of the thesis I would dare to say yes to this question. The research questions were designed to examine the purpose of the thesis and these questions I would say have been satisfactorily answered. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction and problematization, the aim of this study is not to receive results that are possible to generalize. The aim is to examine different views on homelessness and ways to think around this subjects. The results from this study is recommended and aimed to be used to design and execute a future, quantitative survey study. As a first step of this two-step study, I believe that it has reached its goal.

Before the initiation of the gathering of the material (i.e. the execution of the focus groups) I had certain expectations of what the results would be, even though I of course kept an open mind not to subconsciously steer the results in a certain direction. The expectations, let's call it an hypothesis, included that the participants would view homelessness as somewhat of a non-issue. I.e. that it would be something that they did not really give much thought to in their every day lives. This suspicion was also confirmed, as discussed in the analysis. Furthermore, I expected the participants to know rather little about what the municipality is working with to fight homelessness. This was also confirmed during the focus group interviews. Most participants did not know much about the municipal work and they did not appear to be aware of municipal support of NGOs that are providing food and shelter for homeless people. Lastly, I was expecting that the participants would solely consider homeless people to be individuals sleeping on the streets, preferably drug addicts and alcoholics. This was also confirmed during the focus groups as this was the participants' spontaneous definition. However, as mentioned earlier, most participants also had a second, broader definition of homelessness which is similar to the fourth official definition. In this aspect, the results were a little unexpected.

All in all it can be concluded that the results appear to indicate that the media reporting on homelessness has an impact on the public opinion. The lack of personal experience of homelessness among the participants appear to allow for a rather large influence from the media on the subject.

7.2. Advice on Communication Regarding Homelessness

As mentioned in the problematization and introduction to this study, communication and PR concerning official bodies such as municipalities can be a sensitive issue. As purpose of the work of these bodies is to serve the public – the common good – so need all the communication regarding it. Hence, it is important to thread carefully in the planning of PR actions. Any flow of information should have the aim to do exactly this – inform. No more, no less.

In the specific case of communication on homelessness and the work surrounding it, this would mean that any communication is focused on informing the public about what work is being performed to prevent and resolve homelessness in Gothenburg. However, it also needs to communicate what is *not* being done. This could be said to be the important difference between PR concerning public bodies and PR concerning private organizations.

The question that Göteborgs Stad however need to ask themselves, is whether or not communicating their work on homelessness is of importance? Or is it enough – and maybe even better – to only put effort on working with the issue itself? Several participants of the focus groups did albeit express a wish for more information on what the municipality is doing to improve the situation for homeless people in Gothenburg, which indicates that there is an interest among the public. However, as mentioned in the analysis of the results, the participants appear to be a so called latent or, possibly, aware public. This means that they do have a certain interest and experience of the problem but are not really engaged. They might appear to be more interested in the subject during the focus group sessions than they are in their every day lives. This should be kept in mind when considering what amount of time and funding should be entered in to further communication planning regarding the

municipal work on homelessness.

If Göteborgs Stad decides to execute a stronger communication on homelessness, I believe it is important to consider the so called media logic that has been described earlier. To adapt to the conditions of the media is vital, and inevitable, if an attempt to receive media attention is to succeed. However, care should be taken not to adapt to this media logic too much – the information needs to remain factual and as neutral as possible, albeit in a package that is attractive to the media.

While discussing further information on the municipal work on homelessness, the participants also brought up something that I believe is very important and which has been mentioned several times in this thesis; it is more important that Göteborgs Stad use money to actually improve the situation for homeless people rather than to spend money on telling the public what they are doing for homeless people. This is a vital result from this study. It is very possible that a campaign which is focused on informing the public about Göteborgs Stad's work might be perceived as a waste of money and even as the presenting of a polished image to the public. This is a danger that should be carefully considered. Furthermore, the municipality should ask themselves how important it really is that the public does know of the work that is being done. Will it improve the work itself? Will it serve the public? Will it serve the homeless? Personally, I do believe that it is relevant and fruitful to inform the public of this work. A general awareness does not necessarily, of even importantly, increase the understanding of the work that Göteborgs Stad is performing. However, it might increase the understanding of the situation as a whole. This in its turn might help to increase the attention that is being given to the issue of homelessness, including that of the media. Problems that are given a lot of attention may also have a greater chance of improving. In short – any communication on the subject of municipal work on homelessness shall, in some aspect, aim to improve the social situation – not to improve the image of Göteborgs Stad.

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