



## Homelessness: Case Studies from Pilsen

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### Abstract

The phenomenon of homelessness is affecting an ever larger number of municipalities in the Czech Republic, and it seems to be a structural problem that can hardly be solved by directive approaches and proclamatory and spectacular gestures during political campaigns. The text above informs about a publication that will be published at the beginning of 2021. This monograph combines two formats of approach to the research. Applied research predominates over basic research. Their common subject of interest is the issue of homelessness, which is associated with a specific place, namely the city of Pilsen.

### Keywords

Homelessness; Pilsen; the Czech Republic; Applied research;

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The phenomenon of homelessness is affecting an ever larger number of municipalities in the Czech Republic, and it seems to be a structural problem that cannot be easily solved by directive approaches and proclamatory and spectacular gestures during political campaigns.<sup>1</sup> Homeless people are clearly among the socially weakest groups because the loss of their homes or the threat of this loss contributes significantly to lack of security.<sup>2</sup> This makes it difficult to realise goals and aims that lead to a good life.

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<sup>1</sup> In most cases, just before the elections, especially in the case of municipal elections (e.g. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/ubytovny-a-bezpecnost-to-je-hlavni-tema-kampane-v-plzni-jednoduchy-recept-ale-strany-nemaji-56710> [quoted on 4 May 2019]).

<sup>2</sup> Nemiroff, R. *Beyond Rehousing: Community Reintegration of Women who Have Experienced Homelessness*. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2010); Ravenhill, M. H. *The Culture of Homelessness: An Ethnographic Study*. (London: LSE, 2014).

There are many reasons for studying homelessness.<sup>3</sup> These include strengthening public sensitivity, opening up ‘social scissors’ (a Czech term used to describe the differences between classes, primarily socially, where the rich become richer and the poor remain poor when the ‘social scissors’ open up), increasing social separation, and transforming forms of work, as well as media sensationalism to bring emotionally tuned stories closer. In addition, economic stagnation, migration, rising unemployment, overall subjectively felt dissatisfaction and intensifying fears about the future result in a societal demand for a demonstrative solution to the ‘burning problem’ of homelessness. The result is a relatively incomplete knowledge of the causes (whether they be economic, social, or psychological, i.e. whether the problem is of a structural nature or an individual one), resulting in a flat-rate idea of the group, referred to as homeless.

The need to find out the true nature of things, in the case of some cities, is therefore more of an externality of unsolved or displaced situations, which has gradually become more of a problem. Increasing numbers of people on the street as well as those at risk of latent homelessness are associated with questions about the causes of such a condition, but also with problems of chronization of homelessness. Czech society is generally beginning to perceive these problems more as something that either threatens or harasses them immediately. As a result, homelessness is becoming a part of everyday lives and is entering the immediate vicinity.<sup>4</sup> Long-term overlooked risk factors for people in or at risk of homelessness (a fall into homelessness,<sup>5</sup> on the basis of a low level of education, as a result of a personal biography associated with deprivation acquired in dysfunctional families,<sup>6</sup> addiction/dependence on alcohol<sup>7</sup> or drugs,<sup>8</sup> unemployment, etc.)<sup>9</sup> and their accumulation are of concern to the city districts, to the extent that the districts are turning to research teams to call for synergies to deal with the situation.

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<sup>3</sup> Mareš, P., and T. Sirovátka, “Sociální vyloučení (exkluze) a sociální začleňování (inkluzie)– koncepty, diskurz, agenda. [Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion - Concepts, Discourse, Agenda]” *Sociologický časopis* 44, no. 2 (2008): 271–294; Musil, J. *Sociální a kulturní soudržnost v diferencované společnosti*. (Praha: CESES FSV UK, 2008); Prudký L., and M. Šmídová. *Kudy ke dnu*. (Praha: Socioklub, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hradecký, I. “Building Capacity of Homeless Services in the Czech Republic.” *European Journal of Homelessness*, no. 2 (2008): 177–190.

<sup>5</sup> The fall into homelessness occurs in several stages, i.e. in the process of decreasing chances of retention and hence reintegration into the majority society [Hutson and Liddiard 1994].

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g. [Caton et al. 2005; Ferguson 2009].

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. [Sosna and Brunclíková 2019].

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. [Berg 2016; Keys, Mallet and Rosenthal 2006].

<sup>9</sup> I am fully aware that social factors are not the only cause of an individual’s decline into homelessness. Personal characteristics are also an integral part. Some authors have shown that the influence of personal characteristics is crucial for the individual’s ability to cope with the pitfalls of life, and prevent the fall into homelessness [Fertig and Reinglod 2008].



**Picture 1.** The place of sleeping: garage

The same was true for the City of Pilsen. The Department of Social Services (DSS) seeks repeatedly to obtain relevant data on the situation of the homeless due to the fact that homelessness is increasingly being paid attention to both around the world and in the Czech Republic. This is because homelessness has become an integral part of all major cities, which represent the catchment areas of socio-economic life, including the City of Pilsen. Analyses of the causes of homelessness in the Czech Republic are relatively recent, since before 1989, for ideological reasons, this phenomenon ‘did not occur’. Furthermore, social structural changes, which are caused by the transformation of industrial society into post-industrial society, have become increasingly visible only since the second half of the 1990s.

As a result, larger Czech cities in particular are increasingly forced to cope with the issue of homelessness. A positive aspect is that major Czech cities are beginning to address this topic and are looking for tools and strategies to solve the problem.<sup>10</sup> To successfully

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Černá, E., Ripka, Š., and I. Bartošová. *Analýza výchozího stavu účastníků z cílové skupiny projektu ‘Pilotní testování rychlého zabydlení rodin s dětmi [Rapid re-housing]’*. (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2018); Hruška, L. et al. *Studie o stavu bezdomovectví v Ostravě*. (Moravská Ostrava: PROCES s.r.o, 2012); Nešporová, O., Holpuch, P., Janurová, K., and V. Kuchařová. *Sčítání osob bez domova v České republice 2019 [Census of Homeless Persons in the Czech Republic 2019]*. (Praha: VÚPSV, v. v. i. – Výzkumná zpráva, 2019); Prudký, L., Hradecký, I., Klinecký, T., Tomešová, L., and L. Varga. *Návrh koncepce pro postupné řešení problematiky bezdomovectví v Praze. [Draft Concept for the Gradual Solution of Homelessness in Prague]*. (Praha: MHMP, 2011); Šnajdrová, Z., and P. Holpuch. *Sčítání bezdomovců na území Hl. města Prahy [Homeless Census in the Territory of the Capital City of Prague]*. (Závěrečná zpráva, Praha, 2010); Toušek, L. *Analýza situace ‘bezdomovců’ v Plzni včetně identifikace jejich počtu [Homeless People in Pilsen: Enumeration and Analysis of the Situation]*. Plzeň: Centrum aplikované antropologie a terénního výzkumu při Katedře antropologických a historických



**Picture 2.** Place of sleeping: caravan

implement a solution to homelessness, however, the city would also need the support of the state through changes to legislation. The state must also declare its intention to systematically address the issue of homelessness by, for example, increasing political support for analysis of welfare policy and homelessness.<sup>11</sup>

věd Západočeské univerzity v Plzni (CAAT), 2009. Váně, J. *Co se míní tím, když respondenti volí z možných odpovědí po důvodech ztráty stálého bydlení, kategorií 'jiné'. Výzkumná zpráva k návazné studii na Latentní bezdomovectví.* [When Respondents are Asked about What Reasons Led to Their Homelessness, What Do They Mean When They Choose the Category 'Other' as Their Response?]. (Zadavatel: Odbor sociálních služeb – Magistrát města Plzně, Plzeň: Katedra sociologie, Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, 2018); Váně, J. *Definování potřeb sociálních služeb u cílových skupin (senioři, zdravotně postižení, rodiny s malými dětmi, děti a mladiství - ohrožená mládež, osoby ohrožené vyloučením, cizinci). Výzkumná zpráva.* [Defining the Needs of Social Services in Target Groups (Seniors, the Disabled, Families with Small Children, Children and Adolescents —At-Risk Youth, People at Risk of Exclusion, Foreigners)]. (Zadavatel: Odbor sociálních služeb – Magistrát města Plzně, Plzeň: Katedra sociologie, Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, 2018); Váně, J., and F. Kalvas. *Fenomén bezdomovectví. Výzkumná zpráva.* [The Phenomenon of Homelessness]. (Zadavatel: Odbor sociálních služeb – Magistrát města Plzně, Plzeň: Katedra sociologie, Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, 2014); Váně, J., and F. Kalvas. *Latentní bezdomovectví. Výzkumná zpráva.* [Latent Homelessness]. (Zadavatel: Odbor sociálních služeb – Magistrát města Plzně, Plzeň: Katedra sociologie, Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, 2015); Váně, J., and F. Kalvas. *Zmapování potřeb, spokojenosti a očekávání, včetně predikce vývoje v oblasti sociálních služeb v Plzni. Výzkumná zpráva.* (Zadavatel: Odbor sociálních služeb – Magistrát města Plzně, Plzeň: Katedra sociologie, Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> O'Sullivan, E. "Housing and Social Inequality in Europe" In *Housing and Inequality*, edited by I. Anderson, and D. Sim, 81–94. (Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing, 2011); Pleace, N. "Homelessness and Inequality." In *Housing and Inequality*, edited by I. Anderson, and D. Sim, 187–221. (Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing, 2011); Anderson, I., Dyb, E., and J. Finnerty. "The 'Arc of Prosperity' Revisited:

The phenomenon of homelessness is the subject of a number of studies (see above). I would like to take this opportunity here to announce a publication that will be published at the beginning of 2021. This monograph is the result of several years of work. The name of the book is *Homelessness: Probes to Excluded Environments* and the co-author is František Kalvas.

In this monograph, we build on our studies that combine two formats of approach to the research. Applied research predominates over basic research. The common subject of interest is the issue of homelessness, which is associated with a specific place, namely the city of Pilsen.

We pointed out, from the very beginning, that the phenomenon of homelessness in the City of Pilsen cannot be resolved with immediate definitive validity. It is evident that, due to the economic and social importance of the site, the City of Pilsen will continue to be a place that includes homeless people. We argued that the number of overt homeless people will rise in view of the intensifying economic pressures that affect both the lower and middle classes.<sup>12</sup> This prediction is still being fulfilled. The numbers of apparent homelessness (manifest homelessness) are growing, both in the country as a whole, and in the city of Pilsen itself.<sup>13</sup> This is despite the long-lasting economic boom that could end at any time.

I would like to introduce the chapters that are in this publication. The first chapter, ‘Introduction’, presents the reader with the book structure and the basic research terminology in the area of homelessness. The research study itself is presented from chapter two.

Chapter two, ‘The Phenomenon of Homelessness’, reflects the research that we carried out in 2013–2014. This study is the result of our first stronger and more extensive research input into the homeless environment. The preparation and implementation were not without minor conflicts over method and procedure, not with the sponsor but instead with colleagues from other sectors. We consider the methodological approach and its justification to be one of the most important benefits and innovations in addition to the way we organise the collection of results and the results themselves.

We realised the second research topic, presented here in the third chapter, ‘Latent Homelessness’, in 2014–2015. This appears in the second chapter. This is a follow-up study to ‘Manifest Homelessness’. With the intensification of problems associated with apparent homelessness, the City of Pilsen has shown that it needs to know what the area of latent homelessness actually is. We turned our attention in this study to people who were threatened to move from a latent homelessness category to manifest homelessness due to a change in the law, effective from 1 January 2015.

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Homelessness Policy Change in North Western Europe.” *Homelessness and Social Inclusion* 4, no. 4 (2016): 108–124.

<sup>12</sup> Keller, J. *Nová sociální rizika a proč se jim nevyhneme*. (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2011); Standing, G. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Nešporová, O., Holpuch, P., Janurová, K., and V. Kuchařová. *Sčítání osob bez domova v České republice 2019 [Census of Homeless Persons in the Czech Republic 2019]*. (Praha: VÚPSV, v. v. i. – Výzkumná zpráva, 2019).

From a methodological point of view, the most important thing was to identify individuals who fall into the latent category (and therefore are threatened by a possible fall into the apparent category) of homelessness. In addition to the findings and methodological approaches, it is apparent that we have obtained a detailed overview of the economic possibilities of research participants.

We consider this information to be important, despite the fact that questions on income were perceived to be very sensitive by groups such as the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO). According to CZSO, asking about income reduces the chance of return during repeated investigations. In this light, our research seems to be unique because it provides measurable findings about incomes and their allocation to a group of people who are significantly at risk of poverty.

The fourth chapter, ‘Mapping Needs, Satisfaction and Expectations, and Prediction of Developments in the Area of Social Services in Pilsen’, brings forth research from 2016. In carrying out the research, we sought to provide data on the basis of which it would be possible for the city to establish long-term plans for working with socially needy groups. The aim was to therefore provide a representative sample of the population of the City of Pilsen in order to ensure the efficient use of funds in providing assistance to persons seeking social inclusion or preventing possible social exclusion. Attention was therefore paid not only to the homeless (obvious/latent), but also to other groups that are at risk of homelessness.

The individual chapters demonstrate how the reception of the homeless theme gradually settled into the agenda of the City of Pilsen and eventually became more topical. This contributed to the need not only for follow-up studies but also for extended-themed studies. The third chapter is an example of this. The reader can look to this chapter if he/she wants to first obtain an idea of the situations of the most vulnerable groups in Pilsen, as



**Picture 3.** Place of sleeping: dormitory

identified by the DSS. These are the homeless, seniors, foreigners, families with children who are considered problem youth, and individuals with physical and/or mental disabilities. The chapter also includes demographic data and expectations for the development of the City of Pilsen.

It is important to say that in chapters two, three, and four, we did not present any conclusions. The reason why we do this is as follows. In the research reports themselves, we responded to the results and the situation at the time. These were practical suggestions. Many of our recommendations have been put into practice (we are talking about research taking place in the period 2013–2016).

The fifth chapter, ‘When respondents are asked about what reasons led to their homelessness, what do they mean when they choose the category ‘other’ as their response?’, provides research conclusions from 2018, which were, contrary to previous procedures, implemented strictly on the basis of qualitative methods. The main goal was to verify some of the uncertainties in the research results of ‘Latent Homelessness’. The data obtained from that quantitative study (‘Latent Homelessness’) revealed that a relatively large share of responses to the question posed to homeless persons about what reasons had led to their having lost their home fell into the category of ‘other’ (40% of those had had permanent housing at some time). This raises the question of whether there is a problem that is being systematically overlooked or if there is a good explanation as to why the share of ‘other’ responses is so large.

In parallel with this research, I also carried out one research project in the same year that, in the form of qualitative research and focus groups, was devoted to verifying the success of the social housing project, whose implementation was initiated by the DSS. The aims were to verify how the project impacts people at risk of homelessness and identify any complications or barriers to its successful implementation. The results of these findings on the social housing project are part of chapter six—‘Merit versus Necessity: Housing First and its Forms in Practice’.

The final chapter of this publication (chapter seven), ‘Does Higher Deprivation Increase Religiosity? A Case Study of Homeless people in Pilsen’, is related to the applied research that is included in this book. While collecting data in an environment of apparent homelessness, i.e. in the environment of a group of people who mostly do not ask for anything because of unavailability, we took the opportunity to investigate whether the deprivation theory applies to the religiosity of the actors and what role religiosity plays in the lives of homeless people. In other words, the data we used in this final chapter was collected during the applied research on manifest homelessness (chapter two). This concludes the circle of research presented in this book. In this chapter, we investigate the religiosity of homeless people in Pilsen. We also test the validity of the theory of deprivation in the Czech Republic, i.e. we test the assumption that people exposed to long-term forms of deprivation tend to incline towards some form of religion. We gathered our data through a survey, in which the final sample of homeless people used for the presented analyses was N=181. We compared the religiosity in this sample with that in samples of the general population of



**Picture 4.** Place of sleeping: street

the City of Pilsen and the general Czech population surveyed in the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) 2008 ( $N_{\text{Czech}}=1418$ ;  $N_{\text{Pilsen}}=30$ ). This revealed that the level of religiosity among Pilsen's homeless population is about the same as the level of religiosity among Pilsen's general population and is slightly lower than the level of religiosity among the general Czech population. This result provides a strong argument against the validity of the deprivation theory. We also found some support, however, for the deprivation theory; we found that general Czech citizens from the lower and working classes were more religious than individuals from the middle and higher classes.

We followed up on the long-term research in the years 2020–2021, when we carried out another large survey, the basis of which was the inspiration for the so-called Peace Polls by Colin Irwing [2020]. We will be pleased to present the procedure and results in the upcoming publications devoted to this issue.

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