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# Researching Housing Exclusion and Homelessness in Southern Europe: Learning Through Comparing Cities and Tracking Policies

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› **Abstract\_** *This article aims to highlight how cross-national research can contribute to documenting, explaining and better addressing the rising levels of housing exclusion and homelessness in southern European cities. The article introduces a historical and comparative perspective for documenting housing exclusion and homelessness, and for exploring the capacity of local policies to cope with new demands. It documents examples of inclusive housing practices and suggests that the conceptual and methodological advances of recent 'policy mobility' research can be useful for exploring which forms of solidarity and creativity can offer sustainable alternatives to the top-down imposition of neoliberal reforms. These observations are linked with a number of proposals for developing the research agenda on poverty and homelessness*

› **Keywords\_** *Housing exclusion, southern Europe, policy mobility, local responses to homelessness*

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## Introduction

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*"If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change"* (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 1960)

For more than two decades, FEANTSA has played a significant role in broadening the perspectives of its members in the countries of southern Europe and in elucidating the value of their own experiences for successfully linking housing with social integration policies. FEANTSA has also recently played a significant part in advancing the claims put forward by its southern European members with regard to the detrimental effects of short-sighted austerity policies. Combining advocacy and learning contributes to the politics of learning, which, as will be explained in the sections that follow, goes beyond dissemination of prefabricated solutions to local problems.

The quote above comes from the novel 'Il Gattopardo' (The Leopard) by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, the last prince of Lampedusa, and it is widely cited in policy studies. It points to that fact that reforms are often of no real value: 'change but no change'. The novel is set in Sicily in the period of the 'Risorgimento' – Italian unification. That Sicily and Lampedusa are today an entry point to Europe reveals the profound changes that have taken place since the decline of the Sicilian aristocracy. But history is often stubborn; it continues to shape the present and can be useful for learning.

There is another significant reason for choosing this extract. The study of the Risorgimento was influential in shaping Gramsci's ideas about the role of hegemony – the interplay of coercion and persuasion in shaping relations between the state and civil society; how dominant classes or powerful elites use reforms to retain power, and how some radical ideas can be misinterpreted so as to become ineffective. But Gramsci was also optimistic that from the critique of "common sense", which conceals and devalues nonconformist beliefs, "good sense" could emerge, signalling the "rough" and jagged "beginnings of the new world" (Gramsci, 1971, pp.326-343). In his philosophy of praxis, knowledge is related to creative and practical activities establishing a new worldview and a collective will for change. The conceptual framework in the following sections highlights how Gramsci's ideas about a non-conformist and practical view of knowledge are congruent with recent 'policy mobility' research, especially when applied to the field of homelessness and antipoverty policies.

Clarifications about the intentions of this article are included in the introduction, because the questioning of local responses to poverty and homelessness in southern Europe could be easily misunderstood and treated in isolation from changes elsewhere in Europe. Critical inquiry is not to be confused with stereo-

typical representations, which, in the context of the management of the crisis, have been used to blame the societies of the European south. The promoters of neoliberal welfare reforms advance talk about corruption, lack of responsibility and bureaucratic malfunction in southern European countries to justify their own failures and to block alternative pathways for change. There is another side to the story that I wish to shed some light on – namely, how distinct Mediterranean features associated with urban cultures, some of which preceded the birth of charity or state welfare in industrial cities, can sustain change. Such features include civic pride, pluralism, associationalism, municipal and local democracy movements, informal and spontaneous acts of solidarity and organised forms of community care.

The article is structured as follows. Section one provides a brief conceptual overview of the policy mobility literature. In section two there is a discussion on the contribution of policy mobility to homelessness research, highlighting the importance of comparative studies in revealing the complex links between poverty and homelessness. Section three reviews recent evidence on rapidly spreading forms of exclusion, and identifies three policy areas of special interest to southern Europe: preventing the loss of housing and making housing affordable, supported housing, and the housing of recently arrived immigrants. Section four examines the contradictions of homelessness strategies and poverty policies in the context of austerity, and discusses how some of these tensions may be addressed through a considered process of ‘translation’ and a ‘politics of learning’. The Conclusion summarises the potential of policy mobility approaches for comparing initiatives within and across different types of welfare states.

## **Why Learning from Difference Matters: A Brief Review of the Policy Mobility Literature**

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In the contemporary jargon of European institutions, much hope is vested in social innovations, experimental social policy and evidence-based social interventions. Such discourses increasingly permeate studies of homelessness and poverty.

In recognition of the shaping of public policies beyond national boundaries, a number of theories have emphasised the processes of policy transfer, multi-level governance and policy mobility (see McCann and Ward, 2011). Despite differences, all of these approaches emphasise the role of different forms of knowledge in policy change, and renew interest in transnational and trans-local networks of learning. Significantly, examples of anti-poverty, social inclusion and housing policies have been used to elaborate rather distinct approaches to policy mobility (e.g., McFarlane, 2011; Peck, 2011; Clarke *et al.*, 2015; Peck and Theodore, 2015; Roy and Crane, 2015).

In their comprehensive review of earlier approaches to the global diffusion of policies, Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett (2007) identify four distinct theories, each emphasising different pathways to change. Coercion theories explain how fiscal conservatism or trade liberalisation is enforced in economically weak states by international financial institutions, through the imposition of sanctions or conditions for granting aid. Competition theories argue that countries compete to attract investment and to sell exports by lowering labour costs, reducing constraints on investment or reducing tariff barriers. Constructivists focus on how epistemic communities and international organisations shape policy norms to combine economic development with human rights. Learning theorists suggest that countries learn from their own experiences as well as from the policy experiments of their peers.

This classification provides a good start for discerning the competing pathways of policy change, although important modifications are necessary to cope with increasing complexity and contingency in policy-making. In contemporary policy-making, the practices of coercion, competition, progressive shaping of policy norms and learning are commingled. Indeed, the blurring of lines is, to a large extent, shaped by the combined use of coercion and consent. Likewise, tensions arise as enforced policies contradict common values of social cohesion or what has been learned from local, inclusive practices.

Peck and Theodore's (2015) 'Fast Policy: Experimental Statecraft at the Thresholds of Neoliberalism' makes a significant breakthrough in the critical analysis of anti-poverty policies across the world. Their politico-economic analysis of neoliberalism accords with a Gramscian view of knowledge, focusing on how actors deal with contradiction, consent or dissent from hegemonic policy norms. The book deals with how crisis-driven reforms travel and change across the cities of North and South America. It uses the examples of 'Conditional Cash Transfer Programs' and 'Participatory Budgeting' to highlight the mutations of neoliberal policies and the negative transformations of progressive practice. Peck and Theodore stress that policy mobility is not simply about the diffusion of 'best practice'; it also consists of experiments in different forms of statecraft. Hybrid forms emerge because some key elements of policies may change from one context to another (e.g. if programmes are conditional upon willingness to work) and are thus subject to diverse and prevailing norms with regard to assisting the poor. Translation, a concept borrowed from the sociology of knowledge, is about the continuous reshaping of policy by a set of mediating actors who redesign and implement policy in new directions.

Although Peck and Theodore stress how crisis situations establish the conditions for urgent welfare reforms and the mobility of policies, their emphasis is on the expertise and leadership of cosmopolitan technocrats, rather than the coercion mechanisms with which even the designers of policies have to comply. Conformism

is reinforced through ‘mimesis’ – a replication of branded models, whilst ‘mutability’ is a way of challenging policy orthodoxy through the changing of model components (Peck and Theodore, 2015). More controversial significance is attached to ‘modelling’ – that is, the technical framing within which solutions are sought, because technologies can either encode or disrupt neoliberal rationalities (Peck and Theodore, 2015). Nonetheless, Peck and Theodore’s emphasis on the pragmatism of policy-making in their 2015 publication underlines the loss of the critical power of some earlier writings (e.g., Peck, 2011; 2012). Much of the pragmatic rhetoric of policy makers adheres to a positivist philosophy, which undervalues both the coercive imposition of neoliberal anti-poverty reforms related to the mechanisms of austerity, and the mutations stemming from conservative attitudes towards the poor.

It could, however, be argued that a distinction between practical knowledge and those versions of pragmatism that disregard ethical and political questions is analytically useful. To Gramsci, pragmatism, in its Anglo-Saxon inception and utilitarian orientation, is concerned with changes in the immediate reality; it is a sort of ‘experimentalism’ [sic] after direct observation (Gramsci, 1971). In contrast, practical knowledge is concerned with culture and values, the setting of ethical aims, and the formation of a new ‘mentality’ disposed to the diffusion of intellectual ‘innovations’ – in effect, a ‘passion’ for and political commitment to structural change (Gramsci, 1971). In times of crisis, ethical and utilitarian concerns may diverge and ‘educational relationships’ can be seen as the way to reorganise popular values and beliefs in order to transform the world. Gramsci’s intuition that a new language of praxis is necessary in order to reflect properly the environment in which problems are formulated is instructive for the further elaboration of the concept of policy translation (Gramsci, 1971).

Freeman (2009) reminds us that the standard use of the term ‘translation’ in English refers to the physical removal from one place to another and so the term has been associated with the carrying over of meaning from one context to another. The more contexts differ, the more meanings proliferate, which is why ethnographic work on policy translation emphasises the significance of knowledge derived from local experience. Questions about the fidelity of translation are inevitably political, especially where there is a hierarchy of contexts and an uneven distribution of power across places – characteristics revealed by ethnographic interpretations of (post) colonial and neoliberal policy-making. For example, Clarke *et al.* (2015) highlight the fact that social policy translations are always multiple and contested, and that technocratic discourses tend to reproduce neoliberal hegemony as opposed to more creative, locally-sensitive and open-ended processes. Similarly, McFarlane (2011) argues that translation is part of a ‘politics of learning’ from both informal arrangements and the everyday life of the poor.

Analytically, then, it is vital to identify tensions that may exist between the technicalities of reforms on the one hand and cultural norms or ethical values on the other. In the European context, literature on the welfare state is revealing of the stances that welfare bureaucracies and charities take towards the poor, while policy mobility literature focuses on the democratic tradition of community change and participation. Reflecting upon the initial coining of the term 'translation' by Callon (1984), I would suggest that it is useful to consider how the process of translation is initiated by 'problematization' – that is, establishing the necessity for conducting an experiment, engaging the interest of actors, forging roles, coordinating action and recruiting allies. Problematization entails asking why anti-poverty experiments are necessary and how they are framed in terms of effectiveness, justice and democracy. Consequently, I would further argue that it is worth exploring two competing processes of translation: one which conforms to austerity-related reforms, the other facilitating a politics of learning by combining advocacy, community participation and trans-local comparisons.

## **Outline of a Framework for Comparing Changes in European Cities**

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Research associated with the European Observatory on Homelessness has documented the decisive role of different welfare systems in shaping the patterns of homelessness and housing exclusion (e.g., Stephens and Fitzpatrick, 2007; Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2009; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). It has effectively documented how local governments and civil society actors interact in the design and delivery of services for homeless people, and give concrete shape to national regulations. This research tradition, however, could be expanded so as to consider the profound effects of austerity on local communities, and the capacity of local agencies and voluntary agencies to cope with rising levels of homelessness, new needs and new demands.

A distinctive Mediterranean welfare regime, often described as a Southern model of welfare, has been identified through examining the particular ways that countries like Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal have addressed poverty and social exclusion (Mingione, 1996; Ferrera, 1996). Within Mediterranean regimes, two features are of special importance in addressing homelessness and housing exclusion. First, the Mediterranean regime was historically established as a particular version of a conservative continental one through the selective intervention of the state in the provision of education, health and housing, reflecting the claims of social groups and the political mediation of their interests. Secondly, the family has historically been the primary provider of security and welfare. It is especially in the sphere of housing that state provision has been weakest and

family provision strongest (Allen *et al.*, 2004). In contrast with liberal regimes, assistance to the poor was not standardised in terms of need, willingness to work or individual responsibility but was subject to fluctuations in state and civil society relationships, and local norms and values.

On the one hand, the philanthropic ideology of religious and secular charities has, in many countries of the South, been consolidated by centralised, authoritarian political regimes, wherein poverty was seen as a problem of social order, while at the same time, the legitimacy of intervention by the central state was challenged by, or relied on delicate alliances with local patrons. On the other hand, the inadequacies of social protection and restricted housing provision were compensated for by informal solidarity and spontaneous practices, as in self-housing or the development of working class settlements, often in opposition to local authoritarian regimes (Leontidou, 1990). This is the basis for the claim that widespread housing exclusion in Mediterranean regimes is related to poverty (Tosi, 1996), and the reason that visible homelessness, before the refugee crisis, remained at moderate levels, in comparison with liberal or continental regimes, albeit displaying national variations (Fitzpatrick, 1998; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

It should not, then, be surprising that recent surveys on attitudes towards welfare reveal that people in the European south assign greater value to 'need' and 'solidarity' than to 'merit', and that lay criticism is not addressed to the welfare state *per se* but to its administrative inadequacies (Toro *et al.*, 2007; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2013; Roosma *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, the role of civil society in the European south is not confined to formal charities, NGOs or humanitarian assistance, but also includes grassroots organisations, a variety of local solidarity initiatives and even transnational movements (Leontidou, 2016). Many such initiatives were stimulated by the anti-austerity movements in the piazzas of Madrid or Athens, and continue to emerge today in the cities and coastal areas receiving refugees.

The development of welfare provisions – universal coverage in health and education – in the 1980s was related to the restoration of democracy in many countries of the south and to attempts at state modernisation stimulated by the prospect of European integration. However, since the early 1990s, such developments have not been adequate to address needs related to persistent levels of poverty, demographic changes and migration from, mainly, the collapsing socialist states. In the same period, as the limits to European social policy were set by the fiscal conditions of the monetary union, policies to tackle social exclusion were increasingly linked to social innovation, devolution, the deployment of local partnerships, and reforms aimed at the sustainability and efficiency of social protection systems (Kazepov, 2010). Significantly, the housing question scarcely appeared in related discussions, as it was assumed that housing markets and credit expansion could provide afford-

able solutions. This assumption was dramatically proved wrong in many southern European countries when the housing bubble and crash not only laid the foundations for the debt crisis but generated massive inequalities and expansive forms of exclusion (Aalbers, 2016).

Moreover, the Great Recession and the sovereign debt crisis exposed the limitations of the modernisation discourse and the inadequacy of the narrow reforms enacted within the margins of neoliberal experimentation. A critical approach has recently been advanced by Andreotti and Mingione (2016), who recognise the inability of new forms of local welfare, third sector involvement and private services to address social fragmentation. Mingione (2014) has further argued that local welfare systems respond to discrimination and profound inequalities only when social movements promoting democracy and emancipation are involved. I am further suggesting that there is a pressing need to investigate whether local welfare systems can provide integrated responses to widespread forms of housing exclusion related to hidden poverty or if they will eventually become regimes for managing the visible poor. Such contradictory tendencies can be grasped by considering the dynamics between different spatial scales – i.e., national welfare reforms induced by supranational institutions, changes in local welfare systems, and the coping strategies and needs of the poor as expressed in the geographical spaces used for their survival. Institutional changes shape the geography and demography of poor and homeless people at different scales, whether European, national or urban. As Peck (2012) has observed, the devolution of austerity – by which he means the combined deployment of responsibilities to sub-national tiers, together with public retrenchments – highlights the need to assess its impact both on homeless people and on the many agencies involved in their assistance.

The potential for real change can be discerned by distinguishing between two courses of translation and action. On the one hand, there is a politics of conforming to austerity, which includes a repertoire of responses involving the imposition of financial constraints and devolution. These may combine compliance with neoliberal ideas – like experiments with emergency solutions – with insistence on old practices, such as welfare chauvinism and philanthropic ideas about the deserving poor. We have recently documented such tendencies in Athens (see Arapoglou, 2017; Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017). On the other hand, there is a politics of learning, which capitalises on informal solidarity, integrates community responses to the needs of the poor within local development strategies and enhances the supply of affordable and supported housing. The politics of learning both scrutinizes the austerity effects of coercion/consent on the living conditions of deprived communities and opens up opportunities for democratic experiments; it aims to mirror the effects of experimentation with austerity in an accurate way and to integrate grassroots initiatives into local and trans-local networks.

## Documenting the Spread and the Deepening of Housing Exclusion

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Since its formation, the European Observatory on Homelessness has had as a priority the documentation of different forms of homelessness and housing exclusion, and the pressing of European institutions and national governments to produce reliable data. The initial attempts, despite limitations, were crucial to obtaining some estimates of the extent of homelessness in the European south and to opening up research and policy agendas (e.g. Avramov, 1999). Since then, some national governments and statistical services have been more responsive (e.g., Spain and Italy) than others (e.g., Greece). From my own experience and involvement in the first steps of the Greek Network of Housing Rights, I can attest to the negligence of the administration with regard to periodic demands from activists and researchers over more than a decade. The Spanish National Statistical Institute has been carrying out surveys of homeless people and assistance providers bi-annually since 2003. Nonetheless, there is a common trend of underestimating the total number of homeless people, even in more elaborate systems such as the Spanish one (Baptista *et al.*, 2012; Sales, 2015).

The creation of ETHOS may be considered a cornerstone in attempts to document homelessness, and its evolution is a good illustration of co-ordinated learning both within and beyond Europe (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2016). The classification has been endorsed and applied with fair success in individual cities following the intervention of organisational members of FEANTSA. In Greece, ETHOS has been adopted by the Ministry of Welfare, although its first application in 2009 was rather unfortunate (e.g., foreign nationals were not counted) and an extensive homeless survey on the basis of its categories is still pending.

Some of the limitations of the ETHOS classification should be addressed so as to better capture significant dimensions of housing exclusion in southern Europe (suggestions by García and Brändle (2014) for Spain seem applicable to other countries as well). In terms of priority, I would recommend improvement in the following areas to enhance comparability between countries and to make use of data currently available from EU-SILC (EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) and Eurostat's Urban Audit: a) expand the 'housing insecurity' categories related to poverty and economic hardship; b) apply common EU standards to categories of inadequate housing and housing insecurity, and identify which indicators should be prioritised; and c) enhance subcategories of houseless populations, especially with regard to the housing of immigrants and asylum seekers in diverse shelter conditions, such as reception facilities, detention or deportation centres, relocation schemes, housing squats, or informal camps.

The recent work by Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA (2015) on housing exclusion makes use of EU-SILC national data, and it would be worth considering expanding this to the regional level (NUTS2). There is also potential for including further measures of housing deprivation, improving sensitivity to national variations, strengthening the validity of ranking variables included in the index of housing exclusion, and mapping housing deprivation in Europe. Both the specific and the composite indicators of housing exclusion are especially relevant to the effects of the crisis on southern European countries, and so worth briefly summarising here. Poverty, housing and social exclusion, as defined by Eurostat, have increased for all countries of the European south. The four countries noted above all fall below the median value of the composite 'European index of housing exclusion'<sup>2</sup>: of the 28 Member States, Spain ranks 15<sup>th</sup>, Portugal 21<sup>st</sup>, Italy 23<sup>rd</sup> and Greece 28<sup>th</sup>. Housing exclusion in Spain appears to be less widespread than in the other three countries, mainly because the increase in housing cost overburden (i.e. the percentage of households paying over 40% of their income in housing costs) was moderate for the total population. Yet, this picture should be modified, considering the significant recent increases in rent, mortgage arrears and housing overburden among poor households, as well as the dramatic rise of foreclosures and evictions (Ballester *et al.*, 2015; García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016; Kenna *et al.*, 2016). Greece breaks records in obtaining negative values for most individual variables and, consequently, is the country where poor people are most affected by the crisis. Significantly, in all four countries the housing overburden of the poor has increased more than the European Union average, and the gap between the poor and the non-poor has increased.

National as well as regional variations are significant for learning, since they point to inequalities within the established welfare and housing regimes. Although the homeless population is concentrated in the major metropolitan and port cities, acute forms of housing exclusion are visible in some smaller cities and rural areas that host immigrants and Roma communities. Overall, from FEANTSA country profiles<sup>3</sup> and recent reports, a common trend appears in the four countries – namely, that homelessness increased moderately during the crisis, reaching a peak around 2013/14 (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; Arapoglou, Gounis and Siatitsa, 2015; FIO. PSD, 2015; ISTAT 2015, Sales, 2015). Yet, demand from the poor population swells; the voluntary and the public sector can only partially meet expressed needs, mainly due to cuts in funding. Not only have the numbers of homeless people increased,

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<sup>2</sup> The composite index combines: housing costs overburden (+40% of household income), mortgage/rental arrears, overcrowding, inability to keep house warm and severe housing deprivation (see <http://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2016/09/17/an-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe> for details).

<sup>3</sup> Country profiles available at <http://www.feantsa.org/en/resources/>

but also, disturbingly, there has been a deepening in the conditions of their exclusion, especially in the deterioration of their physical and mental health (Madianos *et al.*, 2013; FIO.PSD, 2015; Márquez and Urraza, 2015; Sypsa *et al.*, 2015). In addition, indices of deprivation reveal an unprecedented situation regarding the levels of insecure and inadequate housing.

The more recent arrivals of displaced populations in Europe highlight new conditions of housing exclusion throughout the places they stop, especially in Greece and Italy, which are the entry points to Europe. The peak year was 2015, when the total number of those arriving by sea alone surpassed one million, according to the UNCHR – at least 857,000 in Greece and 154,000 in Italy. Arrivals slowed down considerably in 2016 after the closure of the Balkan transit route and the EU-Turkey Agreement: approximately 171,000 in Greece and 165,000 in Italy had been recorded up to November 2016. Until now, policy attention has focused on the increasing demand for emergency measures and reception arrangements, and some relief will be given through the EU-UNCHR relocation of 160,000 people from Italy and Greece. The relocation scheme, however, is only one small step; the development of an integrated response depends on the shaping of a common European immigration and asylum policy based on solidarity with those needing international protection, as well as among EU Member States.

## **Translation and the Politics of Learning**

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In the post-2008 period, the financial crisis has turned into a sovereign debt crisis, which has particularly affected some of the weakest EU states, especially Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Cyprus and Italy, although through a different combination of factors in each country. Certainly, fiscal consolidation alone cannot put countries into steady recovery and reverse the profound inequalities it has already produced. The new model of economic governance in many of the Eurozone countries includes cuts in social benefits, a decline in workforce numbers and increases in income tax. Labour market deregulation, welfare cuts and the privatisation of public assets are the primary means of granting ‘financial’ aid.

Making use of some of the ideas from policy mobility research, it could be argued that a politics of learning could contribute to revealing the contradictions of conformist thinking and to restoring a democratic and cosmopolitan ethos in policy-making. To begin with, it is important to assess the social and spatial impact of austerity, especially as it is now failing to meet the challenges of migration and mobility arising from events in the Middle East and North Africa. The section above reviewed existing evidence as to the spread and deepening of housing exclusion, but is worth repeating that research priority should be given to documenting those

areas and populations that: a) are most affected by the combined effects of the Great Recession and the housing crunch – that is, those confronting the risks of both unemployment and housing insecurity; b) are in need of health care and support to retain housing – both people on the streets and those drifting towards marginal health conditions when family support proves inadequate; and c) are the focus of recently arrived immigrants and asylum seekers.

The recent deployment of the 'Urban Agenda' for the EU<sup>4</sup> opens up a new arena for knowledge exchange and experimentation on how cities can address the three priority areas outlined above. This agenda provides a favourable opportunity to examine how a community development approach can enable the problematization of policies – enrolling actors and drawing on resources to address poverty, affordable housing and the inclusion of migrants and refugees. In recent years, FEANTSA has been effectively advocating innovative preventive policies and housing-led approaches, which may be sustainable if they become part of community development strategies and are linked to inclusive planning and participatory processes (Meda, 2009). In contrast to the austerity rationale, which focuses on how to manage the demand and cost of services, community development aims at sustaining economic recovery by enhancing the supply of social infrastructure and affordable housing for a variety of at-risk groups. This approach has two main advantages. First, there is more room for relaxing some of the conditions attached to income assistance for households by enhancing social housing and finding alternative means of financing it, expanding public facilities and social infrastructure, and making use of and improving the private housing stock for renting. Second, it facilitates linking housing with community services and advancing integrative solutions and prevention. Translation processes may facilitate this aim, especially if combined with learning within deprived and diverse communities and from homeless people themselves.

At the local and community level, a politics of learning implies being attentive to the survival strategies of homeless and poor people from the very beginning of the problematization of policy experiments. This implies that community knowledge is a prerequisite for change, and so research should be directed to identifying and valuing the work of grassroots groups, homeless advocates and community leaders. There is a very long tradition in urban planning of advocacy and learning, which has increasingly been inspired by cosmopolitan visions and collaborative efforts. Studying the process of translation can give new impetus to policy and participation research. I am suggesting that translation can be understood as a process of making the needs and the capacity of homeless people visible, and of facilitating the expression of their views and feelings so they are communicable.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://urbanagendaforthe.eu/>

For example, fostering an understanding of what it takes – across diverse cultures and gender lines – for a place to feel like home, or explicating how people cope with stigma and barriers to accessing services – topics that are not necessarily captured by statistics. The work of the Barcelona ‘Network of Attention to Homeless People’ (XAPSLL) in expanding the formal collection of statistics in the city is illustrative of this, as is the involvement of FIO.PSD in Italian surveys, and it would be worth translating them into other contexts, ensuring cooperation to make the results comparable, and enhancing insights through qualitative methods.

Translation can also be understood as a process of turning ‘tacit’ knowledge into ‘codified’ knowledge and modifying tools and models in response to local and individual needs. This is exceptionally important when advocating change in terms of inclusion and assistance and when proposing alternative models. For example, supported housing schemes may vary depending on the how sensitive they are to the diverse needs of substance users, families or refugees (Pleace and Bretherton, 2012). Until recently, most US-based research has focused on quantitative assessments and on how the fidelity of Housing First applications impacts on the residential stability and health of clients, and not on links with communities or pathways to inclusion (Padgett *et al.*, 2015; Quilgars and Pleace, 2016). Recent evidence suggests that Italian translations of Housing First (which, it is claimed, deviate from the fidelity model) may well have enhanced community orientation (Granelli *et al.*, 2014; Colombo and Saruis, 2015; Oosterlynck *et al.*, 2016).

Equally important is the enrolment of actors, coordination and mobilisation to generate wider transformation. Coordination can be viewed in terms of creating tools and connecting knowledge from distinct disciplines, especially with a view to addressing multifaceted forms of exclusion in an integrated way. This Journal hosted an enlightening discussion on the impact of housing-led initiatives on their institutional surroundings (Volume 6, 2012: ‘Responses to the Ambiguities, Limits and Risks of Housing First’). Indeed, a criterion for distinguishing between mutations of housing-led approaches should be the extent to which they make use of social housing and community-controlled assets (Hopper and Barrow, 2003). Further research is needed to evaluate the effects of housing-led initiatives on the mix of public and private provision, mental health delivery, income assistance and conceptualisations of citizenship. Recent findings indicate that applications of Housing First in southern Europe have been constrained by the scarcity of public housing, the conditional provision of very low levels of income assistance and a ‘workfarist’ orientation of recently introduced reforms (Greenwood *et al.*, 2013; Busch-Geertsema, 2013, Oosterlynck *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, the history of de-institutionalisation in southern Europe, starting in Italy with Franco Basaglia in the late 1960s/early 1970s, has produced a map of widespread community care in the South which challenges perceptions about its belated development (Mental Health Europe, 2012). This history also stands in contrast to the US experience, where community approaches to homelessness developed only after the failure of de-institutionalisation. Research can reignite interest in community empowerment in order to capitalise on the knowledge accumulated by mental health reformers in setting up supported employment and housing schemes, outreach and floating services, self-advocacy, and so on.

Clearly, a politics of learning as outlined by McFarlane (2011) echoes the Gramscian imperative for ethico-political knowledge aimed at regulating society and ending the internal divisions of the ruled. This claim is, of course, related to the very popular on-going discussion of inclusionary participation and self-government in urban studies, with which a number of long-standing dilemmas are associated; for example, internal divisions today cut across social, ethnic, religious and gender lines and difficult-to-reconcile tensions exist between municipal socialists, community radicals, and charities or NGOs, which often take different positions on 'contest' and 'consensus' in policy-making. Nonetheless, it is worth exploring whether means such as urban forums have been successful in solving questions of this kind and in establishing some form of collaboration between grassroots initiatives and more formalised segments of civil society. It is also worth examining if successful means of citizen participation become institutionalised and give new shape to local statecraft. Related forms of mobilisation can be found in many Mediterranean countries, but perhaps the most illustrative examples may be taken from Spain, which has been the country hardest hit by foreclosures and repossessions (Garcia and Haddock, 2016). The 'PAH' – Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (a platform for those affected by mortgages) – has been pivotal in the formation of the 'Barcelona en Comu' – a citizen platform launched in June 2014 that is currently governing the city of Barcelona with a strategy for defending social justice and community rights. It should not be surprising that the strength of the movement comes both from its deep roots in the Catalan history of local administration and the more recent experience of social innovation and urban citizenship (De Weerd and Garcia, 2016; Di Feliciano, 2016).

Furthermore, translation is a means of advancing transnational forms of learning and advocacy and for reversing the processes that supranational institutions and elites set in motion. FEANTSA itself is an outstanding example; indeed, its own members could explain better than the research referenced in this article how they themselves have been empowered by participating in its activities. There is further potential in strengthening links with transnational urban forums – formal ones like EUKN (European Urban Knowledge Network) and HABITACT (the European exchange

forum on local homeless strategies) or informal ones – and in accelerating the exchange and sharing of knowledge as to how best to address the reception, relocation and integration of refugees from the Middle East. The Mediterranean Sea has historically been a passage for trade and culture, as reflected in the diasporas of port and capital cities, which have become more diverse since the end of the Cold War and now include migrants from Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East; they are thus privileged places for strengthening Europe’s cosmopolitan image. Under conditions of austerity, aside from closing borders and setting ‘tipping-points’ for segregation and relocation quotas, there is an urgent need to codify and transfer the knowledge accumulated over the last number of decades across the many origins and destinations of immigrants. Related research and advocacy initiatives are encouraging, but research will be needed to assess how much of the potential has been realised. Another pressing matter is investigating the translating role of international NGOs and humanitarian organisations that have recently expanded their activities along the Mediterranean coast.

## Conclusion

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The theoretical framing, methodological innovations and themes of policy mobility research offer potential for the exploration of national and sub-national variations in the changing demography and geography of homelessness – changes that have been difficult to identify and analyse through comparisons of welfare states. Policy mobility research also offers a more complex understanding of social policy changes than the ‘Europeanisation’ paradigm, which has tended to focus on formal venues and linear processes of policy transfer. The policy mobility literature brings cities and the democratisation of social policies to the epicentre of research. Specifically, the concept of translation highlights the significance of genuine participation in advancing policy learning.

ETHOS (the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion), and the advancement of housing-led approaches can be considered milestones in homelessness research and policy in Europe. Could their development and prospects be understood as processes of politicised learning and translation? The main part of this article has offered some insight into this idea.

The dialogue developed in the *European Journal of Homelessness* has contributed to the openness of the construction of both ETHOS and Housing First in Europe. It is a matter of concern that ETHOS has, for political rather than technical reasons, not been exploited in policy-making, as many researchers would have expected it to be. In a world of fast policy-making, shortcuts might involve advancing a ‘light’ version of ETHOS, and it might be worth pursuing a demonstration of research

effects by involving core cities of Europe in a common exercise (as with HABITACT). Housing First in Europe seems to have been rather successful as a policy that has travelled, and it is worth advancing research on its implementation where this is linked to the development of social housing and community building. A similar approach could be taken to advance comparative research on integrated territorial and community approaches to the housing of asylum seeker and refugees. The journey to achieving such common research frames would probably be as long and complex as those that established ETHOS and Housing First in Europe.

Let me conclude with a tale borrowed from Italian colleagues working in community health promotion (Garista *et al.*, 2015). It is a tale that Gramsci told to praise cooperation and planning to his son in a letter from prison. A mouse drinks the milk of a child in a deprived community. The mouse regrets this when the child cries, and travels to the mountain to restore the cycle of milk production. It convinces the mountain to give up its stones so that the water mill can function and the fields can be watered to grow grass for the goat to eat and make milk. The mountain agrees to give its stones and the child, when grown, plants chestnuts, oaks and pines on its slopes. Long-term planning is not congruent with fast policy-making, but is it not worth learning from the travels of this mouse how to repair suffering and restore communities of mutual exchanges and cooperation?

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