Conflict, Rooflessness and Use of Public Space
Profiles of Homelessness in the Czech Republic

Prepared for the European Observatory on Homelessness

Ilja Hradecký

Prague, October 2006
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Introduction

At the Dundee conference in March 2006, Working Group 2 of the European Observatory on Homelessness, which focuses on the profiles of homelessness, asked itself a question it wants to find an answer for: *Homeless people, the use of public space and conflict*. The topical report for 2006 tries to answer this question. The foundation of this research is a questionnaire survey focusing on the way homeless people use public space, the way they perceive it and what conflict can arise from this. The research should also use available secondary sources.

![Figure 1. Roofless at metro station Národní třída in Prague](image)

The target group of this research are homeless people who spend most of their day in public spaces, people who do not have a home of their own, sleep rough or possibly use night shelters. These are also people dependent on various emergency services. According to the European ETHOS typology they belong in the “roofless” category. They are in a situation of triple exclusion – social, legal and physical – belonging, according to ETHOS 2006, to subcategories 1.1 and 2.1.
Methodology

Research And Professional Consultations

The first task was to find out whether there is any research literature focusing on this topic and what sources are available. The search discovered final reports from field research projects carried out in two Prague city districts, commissioned by the municipal administration bodies. Monitoring reports and partial results are also available from a project currently carried out by a group of NGO’s, funded by the ESF. There is a final report from the Winter Emergency Centre Letná, a tent refuge set up in winter 2005/2006, and a statement of the City of Prague Emergency Medical Service concerning the establishment and operation of this refuge.

A search was also carried out of relevant newspaper articles and of the internet, including chat rooms. Important information from news articles is quoted below. A website was found of an exhibitionist group of aggressive youngsters who attack homeless people.

A search through political documents was carried out in order to establish a political context. Information was also collected about the attitudes of municipal administration representatives, especially local politicians, towards the issue of visible homelessness.

The preparation of the methodology included professional consultations with researchers, public administration workers (MOLSA, Ministry of the Interior, City of Prague authorities), street workers and social workers, with day centre employees, a doctor and with professionals implementing relevant projects.

Questionnaire Survey

The scope of survey was agreed in the working group. The methodology is based on a survey in the form of directed interviews with at least five homeless people according to a unified questionnaire. The questions focus on those areas of the rough sleepers' lives, which characterise their strategy for surviving without a home (see inset frame in next side). The questionnaire was filled in by the interviewer during the course of the interviews, marking down the relevant statements of the respondents.

The selection of respondents was done so that it would include both men and women, younger and older, ethnic Czechs and representatives of a minority. A hypothesis was drafted, based on the experience of street workers and workers of walk-in services, that people who seek help in day centres have a different survival strategy from those who do not seek out this help. In order to confirm or negate this hypothesis, respondents were selected from two different environments. In order to compare both environments, three interviews were carried out with clients of the day centre and three with people living outside. The latter three interviews were done together with street workers, directly in the locations the respondents consider their homes.

The proposed evaluation of the questionnaires consists of two steps. In the first stage, the responses are transferred to a table. The matrix with 6 columns corresponding to the number of respondents will have 13 subsequent sections with questions and sub-questions in the required number. The fourteenth section complementing the responses will give a description of the interview's location. The spreadsheets serve as working materials for the second stage of evaluation and are not included in the report. The second step consists of verbal evaluation and interpretation of the responses, including comments, which form the following chapter of the report.
QUESTIONNAIRE No. ...

1. How and where do they spend the nights (alone or with whom – with the consent of the owner, landlord – with what chance of getting some sleep – morning hygiene, toilet, how and where)

2. Where do they meet with friends (during the day, in the evening)

3. How do they get their food (where do you get drinking water – what about breakfast, lunch, supper – for money, for free, for work – easily or not easily – did you ever have to steal food)

4. How do they get money (do you have income from work, collecting recyclable materials, other income – or do you receive social welfare, pension – have you ever begged – where, when, how often do you go begging)

5. Description of whole day (where to in the morning – what do you do during the morning, afternoon, evening, when do you go to sleep – what about in winter)


7. Perception of space (why this place – what kind of places previously – if you lose this place, what kind of place will you look for)

8. Health (when did you last see a doctor, where, why – when in hospital, how long, why – how do you treat high fever – health insurance)

9. Human dignity (how do other people, not homeless, treat you – how do homeless people treat you – when do you feel the worst – when and where do you feel best – do you ever hide, why – when do you not hide, why)

10. Culture (do you ever watch TV, listen to radio – when did you last visit a cinema – do you read newspapers, magazines, books)

11. Conflict – where and why (in private, in public – with the owner, landlord, security agent – with police, state official – with other homeless people – with beggars)


13. Anything you want to add?
Questionnaire Survey Results

Selection of Respondents

Interviews with the first group happened in the day centre itself, in private, in strict confidence. The day centre is open regularly all day on weekdays, morning till evening, with short cleaning breaks. Worship meetings for homeless people are held here on Sunday mornings, followed by the distribution of food. In winter, packets with food are also handed out on Saturday mornings. During periods of freezing weather, the day centre is also open at night, providing the homeless with a shelter where they can sleep on chairs or on the floor. Within the day centre, there is also a separate office for a doctor who specialises in providing medical care for the homeless.

Workers of the day centre suggested that respondents should be chosen from those who often visit the day centre but are not even interested in accommodation in the night shelter. All three respondents are middle-aged men (39-54 years). They all gave their answers willingly.

For interviews with the second group we chose locations inhabited by smaller groups of homeless people. Together with a street different areas in Prague easily accessible by tram. These locations are neither on the outer edge of the city, nor in its centre. The first one is a former set of allotment gardens, which has been abandoned for several years and is overgrown with shrubbery; the plot is probably owned by the city. Until recently, there were huts standing in the allotments, inhabited by a larger number of homeless people, but just a short time ago the city authorities had them torn down. The second location is a natural wood with a low building, unfinished for several decades and rather derelict. The compound and building were originally intended for recreation but were never completed or used; the plot and building are probably owned by the city. Homeless people inhabit some rooms in the building.

The choice of respondents was completely incidental, based on the willingness of those present to talk. In the first location, the former allotment gardens, we found two people – a young man (30) with a girl (about 20), both Romany. The man, originally from Slovakia, was just preparing firewood. The girl who is allegedly from Prague and not homeless, sat at a table under a tree drinking coffee. Two small tents stood a bit further away – one is used by this
couple, the other by their friends. The area surrounding the tent was tidy with pieces of carpet and lino on the ground in front of the tent and an enamel bathtub behind it. A fire was on in a wood-stove and a pot stood on top of it. There was a playful puppy running around and a cat with two kittens. The total occupied area was about 100 sq. metres. The radio was playing Romany songs. The man was willing to talk, the girl moved over to sit closer to the radio.

At the other location, about 150 metres away in the same area, we met three people, one woman and two men – her husband and brother-in-law – all aged around 50-60; they are Romanies from Slovakia. The men were sitting in armchairs eating their lunch – boiled pasta with meat from a tin, served on porcelain plates – the woman was sitting nearby on a turned-over wash-tub. There were tents standing nearby and a wood-stove for cooking and various furniture items stood under the surrounding trees; the occupied area was about the same as at the previous location. The woman was willing to give an interview and her husband gave his consent. The interview was private, both men talked to the street workers in the meantime.

The third interview was held directly in the abode of a couple living in the derelict unfinished building, which was originally intended as a background facility for a sports ground. There are several inhabited rooms in the long building. On the concrete porch outside one of the rooms we found a middle-aged man and a woman, both Czech, with two dogs. The woman looked 15-20 years older than she really was. Outside the entrance is a furnace, dry-laid of white bricks without mortar. The man was mending a chainsaw; the woman was, already at noon, cooking peas pudding and eggs on the furnace for supper. They do not eat lunch at noon. The man was not very communicative, the woman, on the other hand, was willing to give an interview. The interview was held inside the dwelling place, in total privacy. The place is arranged as a small flat, the large room (about 40 sq. metres) is divided with furniture into a kitchen and room, which serves as a bedroom and living room. The household is visibly well looked after.

A questionnaire was used to direct the interviews with the respondents. All respondents gave their consent with the recording of their replies during the course of the interview; they all gave their answers willingly. The field respondents were promised a small financial reward beforehand as motivation; financial transaction are neither allowed nor expected in the day centre. Each interview took about half-an-hour. All responses were spontaneous, but their truthfulness can clearly not be verified, their relevance can only be verified by observation.

Two groups of case types turned out during the evaluation of responses. A difference was evident between the people interviewed in the day centre (DC) and those interviewed in street work (SW), more significant than the difference between groups of different sex, age, or length of time without a home. The streetwork people appear to be more enterprising, self-sufficient and active. A deeper study would be necessary to find out what is the cause and what is effect in the other group – their bigger passivity or their dependence on the help of others.

Respondents' Personal Profiles

Questions concerning their personal profile were only asked towards the end of the interviews, once close contact had been established. We will identify the individuals by numbers in the sequence they were interviewed – these numbers also mark the statements of those individuals that follow.

1. A single man, 46, Czech, glassmaker by trade, originally from Šumava (South Bohemia). He lived as a tenant in a farmhouse and lost his accommodation when the farmhouse was returned in restitution to its former owner who then sold it and the new owner ejected the tenant in his absence. He has been without accommodation for 16 years. He suffered a stroke 2 years ago, is blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. He receives a partial invalidity pension of 3000 CZK a month. The interview was conducted in the day centre.

2. A single man, 54, Czech, joiner by trade, originally from Vysočina (South-East Bohemia). After a divorce from his wife 12 years ago, he left his apartment empty-handed. He is being treated for venous ulceration. He makes his living by taking occasional jobs, mainly at building sites. The interview was conducted in the day centre.

3. A man accompanied by his wife, Czech, 39, metal worker by trade, originally from Prague. He lost his accommodation 10 years ago, when he and his wife were living with
a relative and when she died, the new owner of the house, a foreigner, did not enter into a tenancy contract with them and they had to leave the apartment. Later they both stayed with other relatives. They have been without shelter for 3 months. The interview was conducted in the day centre.

(4) A man living in a tent with his girlfriend, 30, Romany from East Slovakia, metal worker by trade. He worked in different places in Slovakia, always staying in workmen's hostels provided by the employers. When he lost his job, he also lost his accommodation. He has been without accommodation for about one year, one year ago he found himself an abandoned cottage in the former allotment garden area; the cottage was torn down recently but he stayed here and put up a tent instead. The interview was conducted in the allotment garden area in the vicinity of the tent.

(5) A woman living in a tent with her husband, 49, Romany from central Slovakia, without qualifications, she was always a housewife. She lost her apartment 14 years ago because of non-payment of rent; she got married and moved to another town but her husband's house burnt down. This is her fourth year in Prague; during the first winter, she and her husband spent the nights on trams, then they found an abandoned cottage and made their home in it. Recently they had to get themselves a tent as the cottage had been torn down. She is employed but for half a year she has been “sick with an incurable disease”. The interview was conducted in the allotment garden area in the vicinity of the tent.

(6) A woman living with a boyfriend, 59, Czech, originally from a town not far from Prague, fine mechanic by trade. After 23 years of employment in one company she lost her job, now she is unemployed and without income. After a divorce two-and-a-half years ago she left her apartment and moved directly into the derelict brick building with a man who is her boyfriend. The interview was held in their living quarters.
Evaluation of Questionnaires

Overnight Lodging

Two men (2 and 3) do not have a stable place for spending their nights; they use benches and trams and feel sleepy. One woman with her husband (5) also has past experience with spending nights on trams, specifically in winter time. One man (1) has been sleeping in a car wreck for an extended period of time. All people contacted in the field have more or less established and maintained living quarters and do not feel a lack of sleep. They live together with their partner, in the vicinity of other people, but do not have friends. One of the DC respondents (3) and his wife sleep rough mainly in public places, but they have been without a roof for “just” three months. He usually visits his friends at their workplace; his friends know that he is homeless. The second man from the DC (1) is a loner, he only meets with other people in this centre, while the third man (2) feels disappointed with people. They are both single and do not have friends. The people from SW also meet with just a limited group of people. All those interviewed understand that they spend their time or nights in public places without their owner's consent but they do not think about it.

Hygiene

We must say that none of those interviewed corresponded with the generally accepted archetype of a homeless person. They were all tidy, in clean clothes, none of them was foul smelling and they were not easily distinguishable from other inhabitants of the city. The DC respondents use the hygiene services of the day centre, especially showers and exchange of clothes; they do not wash their clothes. One of them washes himself in a shopping centre in the morning. People interviewed in the field wash themselves in their living quarters, bringing water by hand or by some means of transport in containers, two of them (4 and 5) from as far as 1,5 kilometres away from a graveyard, one (6) from a pond. They have bathtubs for baths, in two cases (4 and 5) outside under a tree, in the third (6) inside the living quarters with the drain brought out to the outside of the building. They also use it for washing their clothes. One couple (5) go to a sauna when they have money. The SW people have their own dry closets, two of them (4 and 5) in the vicinity of their tents. The third has a dry closet inside their brick building with a barrel that they take out every week (no odour was noticeable in the living quarters). The men interviewed in the DC defecate in toilets in shopping centres (which are free of charge, as opposed to public toilets in the city, metro, train station etc.), sometimes also in pubs; they urinate even outdoors, “in nature”.

Food and water

People from the DC get drinking water from the restrooms in shopping centres, one also in pubs. One SW respondent buys bottled water (4), one brings water from a graveyard (5) and one from a nearby petrol station (6). The SW people buy their food and prepare cooked meals on a wood stove. The couple living in a brick building (6) has two makeshift wood burners made from barrels inside the building for winter; they also have a summer furnace laid-dry from white bricks. People in the allotment garden area (4 and 5) use a wood-heater outside under the trees. The people from the DC come for meals to the day centre on weekdays, they buy their food during the weekend but if they have no money, they go hungry. One of those interviewed in the field admits that they sometimes go hungry for several days. Other man interviewed in the DC admitted to stealing pizza in a garden restaurant from the plate of a guest who was not at his table at the time; when he has no food he searches for food in dustbins. One of the others replied with a definite “no way”, the others were not asked this question.

Money

The question of income was the one with the most varying answers. One DC respondent (1) receives invalidity pension after a stroke, to the amount of 3000 CZK (about 100 €) per month, he gets extra money by begging in a church on Sundays. He also helps with the cleaning of the day centre. One (2) makes a living by taking occasional jobs at building sites and as a watchman; he would be ashamed to go begging. One man (3) had unemployment benefits, he
also worked for a short time without a working contract, because his personal document had been stolen, but this employer still owes him money. He himself has debts from the past from unpaid gas bills. He does not beg. The SW man (4) makes money by collecting scrap metals for recycling, his girlfriend receives social benefits, he would not go begging. The woman in the tent (5) is employed in a shopping centre, for half-a-year she has been on a sick leave with a doctor's certificate. She receives sickness benefits of 6000 CZK (about 200 €). Her husband collects scrap metals and sells them to the recycling yard. Once she went begging in the Old Town Square and in a whole day made 70 CZK (less than 2,50 €); she felt very bad while begging. The last woman interviewed (6) does not have an income, her boyfriend works nearby without a working contract, which gives him an income and other advantages – he can get drinking water and recharge his car batteries. When asked about begging, she replied, “I would not for the world”. With the exception of one respondent, they all have a sense of their pride and their current situation without a home bears heavily on their human dignity.

Daily Programme
Generally, a difference is evident again between those interviewed in the DC and in SW. The DC people mainly roam the city without a specific aim. One (1) goes to a church in the morning, then to the day centre for breakfast, he spends the day in a park and in the city, comes back at meal-times, in the evenings he is alone in his car wreck. When temperatures get very low in winter, he spends the nights on a chair in the day centre. The second man (2) spends his days between a library, church and the streets, he tries to sleep on trams at night, including in winter, but is often thrown out. The third (3) walks around the city with his wife, searching for work and sorting out personal documents to replace the stolen ones. He has not yet experienced winter on the street. The man (4) interviewed in SW goes collecting scrap iron during the day; at the time of the meeting he was sorting out firewood. During the day at least one person must stay “at home” so that no one can steal their belongings. We heard the same response from the woman (5) – someone has to watch the place. Now that she is ill, she does the watching, while her husband goes collecting scrap iron. During the day she cooks, but she also has to see her doctor once a week. Both respondents from the allotment garden area (4 and 5) have spent a winter in the abandoned cottages in this place, before they were torn down. The woman from the brick building (6) spends entire days at home, tending the household, two dogs and three cats, and cooking. They do not go out a lot, but they can lock up the place and leave. In the evening they watch TV powered by a car battery – as well as the people in the garden allotment. The place is warm in winter; they have two wood-burners inside made from barrels.

Feeling at Home
The SW people (s and 5) consider their living quarters their home, although these are just tents and their surroundings. However, the couple in the brick building (6) has an almost unbelievably well established and snug household; the respondent has been here for two-and-a-half years, her boyfriend for as many as five years. The respondent came here directly after her divorce. The people in the abandoned allotment gardens stayed in the same place even after the cottages had been torn down, they just got themselves some tents. They had lived in the cottages for three years (5) and one year (4) and they “felt good” there. In all three cases the perception of being at home, of rest and privacy is also stronger because of personal relationships. The DC men do not feel at home anywhere and do not have a place of rest, only the man from the car wreck (1) experiences rest and privacy in “his” wreck, but feels best in the day centre. The DC men do not have a sexual life; the one accompanied by his wife responded: “I feel sorry for my wife, but no”. This question was not asked in SW.

Perception of space
All respondents were asked three questions concerning this topic: why are they using this place, where had they been before, where will they go to and what will they do when they lose this place. Two men from the DC, obviously embarrassed, could not (or perhaps would not) answer why they survive the way they do. One (2) has been staying in various night shelters and hostel for the last 12 years and does not talk about the future. The other (3) has been
roofless for the last three months, but he lost his apartment 10 years ago and together with his
wife lived with various relatives since then. He worries about the future, he is “on the brink”. The
third man (1) has a feeling of privacy in the car wreck, nobody bothers him, and he always
carries his sleeping bag with him and prefers not to think about what will happen later. The
people from the allotment gardens stay in the same place even after the cottages they had lived
in were torn down, because they are used to the place. One (4) has been here for about one
year, before that he had a job with accommodation, but the company went bankrupt. The
woman with a husband (5) has been in Prague for four years; they came to the garden cottage
three years ago, the winter before that they slept on trams and at the train station. The young
man (4) wants to find a job with accommodation before winter. The older woman (5) would
appreciate if there were some dwelling units or trailers available or if she could at least stay in
a hostel together with her husband. But she is worried they will have to spend the winter on
trams again. The woman in the brick building (6) feels at home here. She came here directly
after her divorce. When asked what she would do if she lost this dwelling place she says,
“I don't know, we'd have to find something”.

Figure 4. My home – my bridge (illustration photo)

Health

The health state of the respondents is very varied. The man from the car wreck (1) suffered
a stroke two years ago and was unconscious for three months. He was awarded partial
invalidity pension. Otherwise he is hardly ever ill. When he had fever, the doctor for homeless
people treated him in the in-patient section.\(^1\) He does have health insurance. The second man
(2) is being treated for venous ulceration by the same doctor; his state improved when he
started sleeping in a horizontal position on benches (until then he only slept sitting on trams).
He gets over fevers without going to bed. He does not pay health insurance. The married man
(3) has his GP in Prague from the time he still had accommodation. He has undergone vascular
surgery, has two by-passes on his legs and was at risk of having part of his foot amputated. He
was not awarded invalidity pension for this. He does not pay health insurance. The young man
(4) “doesn't need a doctor”, he has never been hospitalised, he takes pills for fevers and gets
over them. He is not covered by health insurance in the Czech Republic; he has Slovak

\(^1\) The GP office within the day centre in the vicinity of the central train station receives financial support from the
Ministry of Healthcare outside the health insurance system.
citizenship and is not registered for insurance. The woman (5) who has been on sick leave for half-a-year has a company doctor and goes to her for regular checks. She spent three days in hospital for a surgery of inguinal hernia, during the examination she was diagnosed with cancer (she seemed to be afraid to use this word, it only slipped out of her lips once). She only had fever while she was still living in the cottage. She has health insurance paid for by her employer. The woman from the brick building (6) had an abscess on her hand before Christmas; she had surgery in hospital in outpatient care and had follow-up treatment by the doctor for the homeless. She does not pay health insurance.

Human Dignity

None of the respondents admit to any tensions in relationships with other people, usually not even with other homeless people. Neither do any of them have reasons to hide from people; just one respondent (2) sometimes escapes from other people to the open-air areas on the edge of Prague. When asked about when they feel best and when the worst, their responses vary: (1) “worst when I think of my sister who died two years ago, otherwise I’m an optimist”, (2) “I often feel bad when I replay the film of my life”, “I wanted to throw myself of a bridge”, “I hardly ever feel good, just when I think of some memories”, (3) “I feel bad all the time, it was really depressive to start with and I was considering suicide but I had regards for my wife... and best? That used to be”. The young man from the tent (4) felt bad in winter, he feels good when he has money. The woman from the allotment garden (5) felt best three years ago when, after a winter spent on trams, they discovered this place and an empty cottage where they had a bed and a kitchen unit and could cook food. Otherwise she always feels insecure, the worst part was when “their” cottage was torn down – she really went to pieces. On the other hand, the woman from the brick building (6) often feels good and cannot remember ever feeling the worst.

Cultural Needs

All respondents watch TV often, almost daily. It is available to them in the day centre (1 – 3) or in their living quarters (4 – 6). The people contacted in SW have their own TV and radio receivers powered by car batteries; they recharge their batteries at a friend's place (5), at a junk yard (4) or at the partner's workplace (6). None of the respondents can remember when they last went to a cinema. With one exception (1) they all read newspapers, mainly those distributed free of charge every morning, some also buy them (4 – 6), especially because of TV listings (5). One man (2) reads books in a library, one woman (6) likes reading biographies, one household (5) owns a Bible. The man from the car wreck (1) does not read but enjoys solving word search puzzles.

Conflicts

All respondents take good care of their appearance; they need not be perceived as homeless. When asked about conflict, everyone's responses were negative at first, then rather evasive. It was necessary to ask further, supplementary questions. One man (1) avoids possible conflicts but remembers having one a while ago with a security worker at a shopping centre; he did not explain the cause for the conflict. Another man (2) had a conflict with clerks at the employment office and since then does not want to go to the employment office any more. The married man (3) has repeated experiences with unhelpful officials but has not been involved in a conflict. The SW people state that they do not have conflicts with anyone. The allotment gardens are regularly visited by social workers from the city but the meetings are conflict-free. One woman (6) had a conflict with drunken Ukrainians but when they called the police (they have a mobile phone), the police protected them and took the drunken men away. One woman
(5) is troubled by the fact that when they have no place to go in winter and want to warm themselves up on a tram, the homeless people have to get off at the final stop and the drivers do not stop at the departure stop to let them get on again and leave them standing in freezing weather; she also does not like the fact that train stations are closed at midnight and everyone is sent out into the cold.

Last Question

The last question was if the respondent wants to add anything. The man from the wreck (1) talked about this father who had been in a concentration camp; both his parents have already died. He has two brothers who are alcoholics. He was an alcoholic himself but his faith helps him to stop drinking and being aggressive. He feels free, likes animals and children. The married man (3) does not keep in contact with his parents so that he would not add to their worries. His wife does not have anyone, the father-in-law is in a psychiatric hospital, and mother-in-law died last year. One woman (5) has a daughter in Slovakia who phoned to tell her she was at risk of being arrested for theft when she was selling scrap iron to the junk yard. The woman wants to visit her and see her grandson, who has to keep a gluten-free diet though his mother does not have enough money to buy the special food for him, as “there is great poverty in Slovakia”.

15
Other Findings

Analysis of the Situation of Homeless People in the Prague 11 City District

The Prague 11 City District is a peripheral district in the southern part of Prague. A major part of its territory is built-up with housing estates from the 1970's, so-called panelák (prefabricated panel blocks of flats). Most of the inhabitants commute to the city centre for work; there is no industry in this district and job opportunities only open up with the development of trade and services. This district has many deserted and neglected places; wide urban roads and motorways run through it. The city district has its own municipal administration.

![Figure 6. Housing under street (Prague 11)](image)

The local administration requested an analysis of homelessness in its territory from an NGO², which engages in street work. During the survey, the field workers identified a total of 49 persons generally perceived as homeless, all of them men and no women. Through talking to them and through reference it was established that 24 of them are roofless persons with Czech citizenship, 11 of them are construction workers (mainly from Slovakia and Ukraine) and, surprisingly, 14 of them are citizens residing in this city district. However, people from all three groups do have mutual contacts and lead a similar lifestyle.

The most frequented locations where homeless people spend their days are around supermarkets and other shops, especially those selling cheap bottled beer, and metro stations (68 %). Other popular areas are deserted and unattended quiet corners (22 %) attractive not only for homeless people but also for those engaged in petty crimes, as they give them a feeling of being hidden and unchecked. As the disorderliness of these places is repulsive to other citizens, these groups then have these territories under full control.

The main reasons why homeless people stay here are personal links to this city district – either they lived here previously or they have friends or other personal relationships here. Some find this territory suitable because of its position – in comparison to the city centre it provides a more peaceful environment and more hiding places due to a larger number of deserted areas.

² The on-site survey was carried out by Naděje over a period of three months between May and August 2005 in the entire territory of the city district. The information is taken from the project's final report.
Some homeless people avoid the city centre, either because of the higher concentration of people or more frequent police checks, and prefer to stay in the city’s outskirts.

Due to an earlier informative publicity campaign, the district's citizens, with few exceptions, reacted positively to the project; several people approached the street workers spontaneously. One single case was encountered of substantial aversion towards homeless people and social services for this group. Good results came from the street workers' cooperation with the municipal police force.

Example: A man lived with his partner in her apartment in Prague 11 and together they ran a business under the woman's trade licence. She used her licence to purchase goods but she did not make the due payments. The girlfriend was sentenced and a distress-warrant issued for her apartment and property. The man therefore ended up on the street. He is epileptic and of unsightly appearance due to his deteriorated lifestyle and frequent consumption of alcohol. He cannot find a job and is even losing any motivation for change. For the time being, he refused to visit the day centre or receive other forms of help.³

Results of Field Research Among the Homeless People in the Territory of Prague 5 City District

In the 19th Century, the Prague 5 area was an industrial suburb of Prague and in the 20th Century an industrial part of the city. Today, after a radical change over the last 15 years, it is a business, cultural and residential area and can be considered extended city centre. Especially the area of Anděl (a high-profile business and entertainment area surrounding a junction of two major shopping streets) and the Nový Smíchov shopping centre are very attractive. However, there are also areas of natural vegetation, abandoned houses and derelict buildings within the district's territory, which are attractive for squatting and living in seclusion.

Figure 7. A squat in Prague 5

The local administration authorities requested an analysis of homelessness from an NGO working with homeless people. Due to the size of the city district and the large number of

³ This case report was taken from the project final report.

⁴ On-site survey in the city district's territory was carried out by Naděje for a duration of three months between October and December 2005. Due to the size and layout of the territory the street work focused on the most frequented areas surrounding the Anděl metro station, Smíchov train station and Nový Smíchov shopping centre. The workers also visited eight squats. The information is taken from the project's final report.
persons with socially pathological behaviour it was beyond the power of the street workers to systematically cover the entire territory in the commissioned survey. They therefore focused mainly on the areas surrounding Anděl metro station, Smíchov train station and Nový Smíchov shopping centre. In these areas they approached and identified as homeless a total of 482 persons including 56 women, of whom 244 persons spend their time here long-term (incl. 40 women, 27 foreigners and 24 drug addicts). In the eight visited squats they approached another 134 persons (incl. 22 women); about 50 of them are voluntary squatters who do not consider themselves homeless.

However, the total number of homeless people in the area is higher, because it was not possible to contact all persons from the above-mentioned group. A certain number of homeless people move around the surveyed area on public transport. Their presence on public transport and in indoor public areas such as shopping centres is substantially influenced by the winter period.

Part of the project was a questionnaire survey, participated in by a group of 50 persons, 40 men and 10 women, with a normal age distribution. Responses to the following three questions were relevant for the purpose of this report: where do they sleep, how do they get money, what type of services they are interested in.

When asked about where they sleep, the respondents replied: in a squat (40 %), in deserted structures not designed for accommodation such as sheds or garages (22 %), outside, in a tent, under a bridge (26 %), on public transport (14 %), in organisations (12 %), at friends or acquaintances (8 %).

They get financial income: from legal occasional jobs (30 %), from illegal occasional jobs (34 %), from collecting scrap materials (28 %), from social benefits or pensions (10 %), from begging (32 %), from petty theft (4 %). Some respondents listed more than one type of income, the total is therefore higher than 100.

What types of services they are interested in: hygiene (66 %), food (64 %), clothing (62 %), medical care (40 %), accommodation (28 %). 6 % are only seldom interested in some services, 12% are not interested in any. Also for this question some gave more than one positive answer.

The report also states: The existence of squats and concentration places is determined by other activities – such as repressive measures by municipal police, business owners and district municipal authorities. The surveyed group of people adjusts to these conditions mainly by temporary changes of location, migration to other locations or even by seeking help at charity organisations.

Significant Conflicts

Homeless people often come to day centres and hostels with various kinds of injuries. Sometimes they explain how they sustained them, sometimes not. Some injuries happen out of carelessness, often in drunkenness and are no-one else's fault. Others come from conflicts with uniformed persons – policemen, municipal police officers, security workers, or with people in plain clothes. Almost all cases end at the point of medical treatment as the homeless people do not want to file a complaint. Their reasons might vary; most often it is fear of a possible new conflict. Despite of that, it is possible to objectively document several striking conflicts that were noticed by the public.

Two Attempts at Burning Homeless People

In May 2005, two homeless men were set on fire at two places in Prague, on two subsequent days. During the first attack, someone poured petrol early in the morning over a homeless man sleeping on a bench in a forest park in the city outskirts. The homeless man named Zdeněk was immediately hospitalised in Vinohrady hospital with 2nd and 3rd degree burns mainly to his face and neck, the fire also damaged his airways. After he was released from hospital, he came to a hostel. The doctor from the homeless people's surgery arranged physiotherapy sessions for him. His health state is improving. With the assistance of social workers he was awarded an emergency social benefit, he is already registered at an employment office and receives social benefits at a subsistence level. Zdeněk used to work in an open cast mine. After he lost his job
he stopped paying rent and was evicted to a holobyt (social flat with very basic fittings) and later ended up without shelter. He has no contact with his family and cannot expect any help from them. He travelled to Prague, slept rough; in winter he used the opportunity to spend nights on a chair in the day centre. In February 2006 the press 5 brought reports about a trial together with a photograph of a man with a shaved head. The 22-year-old man with five previous convictions, now charged with attempted murder, denies any involvement in the crime.

The second incident happened on a tram. A 43-year-old homeless man, Mr. V., was set on fire in a tramcar arriving at the terminal station at Divoká Šárka. The tram driver put the fire out with a dry powder extinguisher. Mr. V. had burns on 20% of his body, had multiple plastic operations and, according to the doctors, could have died as a result of his injuries. The Prague Municipal Court gave an eight-year prison sentence to a man known to tram drivers as a fansatic tram lover, a “big boy”, who, according to an expert witness, suffers from a personality disorder. He defended himself in court by saying he had been instigated by the driver, who was also charged with complicity in this violence. The court did not believe this statement but the prosecutor who is convinced about the drivers complicity in the crime filed an appeal. 6

![Figure 8. Injured homeless (illustration photo)](image)

Murders of Homeless Men in Pilsen

In the morning of 12 April 2006 in the former exhibition area in Pilsen, the dead bodies were discovered of two homeless men aged 44 and 49, together with a third man who was injured. The bodies of the victims were lying behind a metal fence close to a river where homeless people spent the winter in shacks. That was also where the murderer attacked them. Based on the character of injuries it is assumed that they were beaten to death with a hard object. The police investigate the case as a double murder and an attempted murder. This murder could be related to a case from two years ago when a homeless man was brutally beaten up in the same area and needed several weeks of treatment. The attacker was never found. The former exhibition area is privately owned and the police do not enter into it. The police are also

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5 “He denies setting the homeless man on fire”, Právo, 14 February 2006
6 “Eight years for torching a homeless man”, Lidové noviny, 21 December 2005
investigating the possibility that the two men were murdered by the third homeless man who was taken away in an ambulance with serious injuries.7

Violence in Opava

In March 2006, three young men were found guilty of murder by the Opava District Court and sentenced, respectively, to 13 and 12 years in prison. The crime took place between midnight and the morning of 23 May 2005 at the Opava railway station. The court concluded that the three had agreed to beat up the homeless man and together they also found weapons for themselves at the station – paving blocks and a pole. The youths first spent some time drinking wine at the station, then they discovered that there were two homeless men nearby whom they knew. They picked up some heavy concrete slabs and armed themselves with a wooden pole. Then they attacked the homeless men who were also drunk, with force. They threw the prepared slabs at them, kicked them and finally used the wooden pole to hit their victims over their heads and necks. According to the court's verdict, the youngsters actually jumped on the men's heads with both feet together and, for extra entertainment, waved their arms as if they were angels taking the souls of the dead to heaven. The youths then left the beaten homeless men lying there and left. The 37-year-old homeless M. K. sustained serious head injuries and died as a result. The 48-year-old man, P. M., was transported to hospital and his life saved by doctors. According to the state prosecutor Brigita Bilíková, the youngsters had no reason for killing the homeless man, they just did it for fun.8

The Flamingos

At the beginning of 2006, criminologists were surprised by the pastime of a group of youngsters who would, in superior numbers, attack boys who could not defend themselves, random passengers on the metro and also homeless people. They recorded their attacks and posted the recordings on the internet. The internet records were eventually instrumental in the successful arrest of the group that calls itself Plamenkáč ("Flamingo" – the word also implies "flames" in Czech). One shot of approx. 2 minutes called "Mosquito vs. Tramp" shows these youngsters attacking in sequence several men who can be considered (also due to the title) homeless. At the beginning one of them is seen beating a bearded man, presumably homeless, in a passageway, first punching him in the head, slamming his head against the wall and finally kicking him in the legs, stomach and crotch. When the attacked man starts to defend himself successfully, two other youths rush in, chasing the man away. Cut to a new scene: The same youngster approaches a man sitting on a bench in a town square (it is not possible to recognize whether it is a homeless man) and suddenly kicks him in the head. The man is immediately surrounded by three other youths. Another cut: Two young men are rushing across the street towards a bearded man, presumably the one from the first scene, when they get close to him they are joined in the shot by two others and another man, perhaps a companion of the attacked. One youngster punches the bearded man in the face, he defends himself, but the other youngsters attack him in superior number; the man is running away, falls on the pavement, the youngsters kick him repeatedly and then leave. Last cut: Pursuit of the bearded man, the beating and kicking continues on a cobble-stone street as the man is pushed over, one youngster sits on the lying man, punching him in the face. Pedestrians and cars pass by and no one intervenes. The entire video is accompanied by music with acoustic accentuation of the punches and kicks.9

Winter Emergency Centre Letná

After several frosty days at the beginning of 2006, the Mayor of Prague declared a state of emergency on 24 January 2006. On the same day the rescue battalion of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic set up 5 tents on the plain of Letná with a capacity of 100 places, after two days the capacity was extended with 3 extra tents to 160. However, already the first night after

the capacity extension, 234 persons spent the night in the centre. Extra beds were brought in but there were always several people spending the night on blankets on the floor. Each tent was heated by two wood heaters; the heating put extra strain on the staff because of frequent changes of environment with temperatures around 25°C inside and -20°C outside. The centre was in operation for a total of 22 nights, until 15 February 2006. Staff for the centre was provided by a group of organisations providing social services for the homeless people in Prague, with substantial help from volunteers.

Voluntary Red Cross medics visited the tents every night and treated the accommodated persons. Most frequently they dealt with colds, venous ulceration, painful joints and muscles, elevated temperatures, minor injuries, rashes, indigestion and burns. People with external parasites, mainly lice, were disinfested on the spot; complicated cases were treated in cooperation with a nearby hospital. In spite of that, the other inhabitants of the tents treated these people aggressively even after they had been cleaned up. The staff on duty often had to solve these conflicts by some additional moving of individuals to other tents.

The structure of users was manifold – among those looking for shelter were people recently released from prisons, young people who had come out of educational institutions, people who...
had come to Prague looking for work and got into social problems. There was a large group of chronically homeless people driven out of their makeshift shelters and squats by the cold weather. In the centre you could come across a man who changed into a suit and tie every morning, but also a woman in a pitiful and critical condition (incontinent, with pressure sores and external parasites). Several foreigners, mainly from Slovakia, Lithuania and the Ukraine, also used the centre’s services.

Approximately 10% of those accommodated were women, mostly partners of accommodated men. Single women only used the tents sporadically. In the beginning, one tent was designated for women but this proved unnecessary – the women refused to be separated from their partners and spent the nights in the same tents with them.10

On Sunday 29 January 2006, a statistical survey was carried out in the tents between 8 and 9 pm. At the time of the survey, 227 persons were present in the centre, of whom 206 were men and 21 women (9%). 33% of the accommodated persons came from Prague, 48% came from other regions of the Czech Republic, 19% were foreigners (Slovakia, Lithuania, Ukraine). All age groups were represented among those accommodated, corresponding with the age structure typical for the Czech homeless population – the age structure does not follow a Gaussian curve but is characterized by a distinct drop around the age of 40. Most homeless people are of working age and there are a disturbingly high percentage of young people among them (see chart).11

![Figure 10. Winter Emergency Centre Letná, the age structure 29 January 2006.](image)

Emergency medical services were also called to the tents on daily basis (sometimes several times). The most frequent indications included epileptic and other spastic fits, injuries and chilblains, scabies, chest pains and intoxication.

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10 The information is taken from an unpublished final report on the operation of the Winter Emergency Centre Letná compiled by the project’s manager Ladislav Varga.

11 The data from the statistical survey, including the chart, is taken from the “Evaluation of Statistical Survey Among the Clients of Winter Emergency Centre Letná”, compiled by Petra Kosová from the Municipal Centre for Social Services and Prevention.
The City of Prague Emergency Medical Service issued several reports for the media concerning the use of public spaces by homeless people. According to its director, there is no registration or statistical evaluation done for any specific group of citizens. Here are several cases of people who could be considered homeless.

On 6 February 2006 at 7:33 a notification was received from the police about the discovery of a body under some bushes in Praha-Košíře. A doctor confirmed the death of the 80-year-old man. The most likely cause of death was hypothermia, the man was only half-dressed. It is not possible to determine with certainty whether he was homeless.

On 31 January 2006 at 10:06 a report was received about a hypothermic person discovered in Praha-Nusle. The unidentified man was around 50, strongly hypothermic, alive but unconscious; during the transport to the Karlovo náměstí hospital he had to be put on a breathing apparatus.

On 31 January 2006 at 12:42 a discovery of a body was reported from Praha-Prosek. On arrival at the location the doctor could only confirm death of unknown cause – most likely hypothermia – of an unidentified man around the age of 50.

On 21 January 2006 at 0:37 after midnight Prague paramedics were summoned to Praha-Braník where they found a dead and burned body of an unidentified man around 50 by the Barrandov bridge. He had fallen into a fire, presumably under the influence of alcohol, and suffered serious burns, which cost him his life.

On 22 January 2006 at 10:21 paramedics were called to Prague 1, under the Štefánik bridge, where a body had been discovered of a 46-year-old man. The doctor could only confirm his death, with hypothermia as the most likely cause.

On 12 January 2006 at 10:41 paramedics were called to Prague 4 where a 66-year-old man, presumably homeless, had fallen into a stream. The seriously hypothermic man was rescued from the water by fire fighters. Despite all the effort and immediate resuscitation the paramedics were not able to help the man – he had obviously spent a prolonged period of time in the icy water and his state was critical.

On 11 January 2006 at 13:53 paramedics were summoned to a 59-year-old man lying lifeless in a shrubbery in a large box, obviously his sleeping place. The doctor could only confirm his death, with hypothermia being the likely cause.

On 8 December 2005, shortly before 10 am, the operator received an emergency call from the police about the discovery of a lifeless body in a dilapidated house by the Hungry Wall at Petřín hill. On arrival at the location the doctor could only confirm death of natural causes – most likely by hypothermia – of the approximately 30-year-old man without personal documents. The man had been dead for about 6 hours, he was probably homeless. A bottle of toluene was also found at the place.

On 11 November 2005 at 8:12 Prague paramedics were called to Prague 9 to the lifeless body of a man lying outside. On arrival the paramedics could only confirm the death of the approximately 50-year-old man. The man without personal documents had been dead for about 30 hours. The cause of death will be determined by autopsy.

Report of Winter Emergency Centre Letná

In its report, the City of Prague Emergency Medical Service states that in the period between 1 January and 6 February 2006 it recorded a total of 28 deaths of hypothermic people found outside, who were probably homeless. This number included 24 men and 4 women; the oldest

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12 The information was e-mailed by the Mr. Zdeněk Schwarz, Director of City of Prague Emergency Medical to organisations participating in the establishment and operation of the Winter Emergency Centre Letná, including the copy of press releases.
man was 80, the youngest woman 18. Six persons were confirmed dead immediately, the other 22 died subsequently.

The director says: We consider this operation as beneficial and desirable, as we know from our field experience of a large number of persons living “on the street” that are outside the medical prevention programmes and do not utilise primary medical care. They do, on the other hand, utilise emergency care, often repeatedly or even consistently, in the most serious situations, increasing the costs for which the medical institutions cannot claim refunds. Controlled care for this group of citizens is desirable for many reasons. It is clear from the available data that there was a remarkable decrease (by about 60%) in the number of deaths for this year.

Figure 11. First aid in the Winter Emergency Centre Letná

Homeless Census Prague 2004

The count in the streets was carried out in public places, including on public transport. The enumerators were given previously prepared maps of the census zones, which had the known gathering places of homeless people marked in them. These were namely:

- train stations and their surroundings,
- shopping centres and supermarkets,
- facilities with evening or non-stop opening hours (pubs, cheap buffets, bars, gambler-houses),
- cinemas showing the film “Jesus” at a voluntary entrance fee (a campaign which coincided with the census),
- places known as overnight sites of homeless people (bridges, parks, natural greenery),
- metro stations (especially in the city centre) and their surroundings,
- streets was carried out in public places, including on public transport.

The project was carried out in February 2004. The specific date was determined based on a long-term weather forecast – choosing as appropriate the conditions of a chilly week with daytime temperatures between –5 °C and –10 °C. The chosen time for the count was in the evening, during the two hours between 8 and 10 pm, when the homeless people are getting ready to sleep. The two-hour interval was to give enough time to the enumerators while preventing duplicate counting. The total number of homeless people registered during the count reached 3,096 persons, of which 2,662 were men (86%) and 434 women (14%), including 14% under 25, 73% between 25 and 60, 8.5% over 60, for 4.5% it was not possible to estimate their age. 23% people were in residential facilities, 13% in day centres, 3% in other institutions, 10% on public transport. 51% of the homeless people were found outdoors.

(I. Hradecký and col.: Homeless Census Prague 2004, final report, Prague 2004)
• metro trains (6 terminal stations),
• evening trams (terminal and transfer stations).

During the entire preparation of the project the gathering areas and overnight sites of homeless people were mapped out and the list continuously updated. The list was eventually finalised with the help of the municipal social workers, street workers and the homeless people themselves.

![Figure 12 Illustration photo](image)

During the census, it turned out that a certain group of homeless people is practically unknown even to professionals, including street workers. They live in enclosed communities in extreme seclusion in hidden and not easily accessible location such as sewers, heat pipelines, ventilation shafts, underground passages, deserted buildings etc. These people usually do not seek the help of social services. More detailed information about these communities is neither known to professionals nor the homeless people themselves. According to the homeless people the number of persons living this way can be in the order of hundreds.

The results of the census showed that less than 24 % of the recorded homeless people spent the night in the accommodation facilities of social services although the capacity of those was almost 100 % full. In addition, a further 13 % spent the freezing night on chairs or floors in day centres. The remaining approx. 63 % of homeless people did not even have a theoretical chance to use a legal shelter from the freezing weather.

**Food on the Street**

As an illustration we can quote from an article published in winter in the Street Paper Nový prostor: “The idea of eating food from a dustbin stops making you sick when you get into a situation like Milan's. He lives in a deserted railway car at the Vršovice station, occupied in winter by about a hundred other people. Food does not come for free and he of course has no money. Don't you think a snack prepared by Mum, still wrapped in a serviette with a piece of cucumber and apple, comes in handy? All these things get thrown out by children on their way to school. Besides the school snacks he also relishes in discarded fruit conserves, jams and tinned food. He says it is even possible to find a whole pizza or a frozen dressed rabbit. Leaving aside Milan's dustbins, which actually also yield some meaty food, meat is the one indulgence that homeless people sometimes allow themselves at the expense of lacking money for other things.”

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14 Petr Holeček: Jídlo na ulici – stačí ho jen sebrat (Food on the Street), Nový prostor 249/2006.
Policy Lessons

To understand the prevailing negative attitude of the public (but also a lot of the media and many politicians) towards homeless people we must mention misunderstandings and mistakes in the terms used. When talking about homeless people in regular communication, the general public, as well as social service providers and some researchers use the word “bezdomovec”. This term however, is understood by general public mainly in the constricted sense, as meaning “rough sleeper” or “roofless”, i.e. persons who do not seek out social services or only do so sporadically. People often do not distinguish between homeless persons and beggars who are not homeless. The word “bezdomovec” thus becomes a term for an unkempt, dirty, foul-smelling and obtrusive person, predominantly a man. This is contradicted by the fact that homeless people who receive social services can by unrecognisable from other people. Such misconceptions give rise to aggressive attitudes among the public, which are sometimes encouraged by a shortsighted statement of a local politician.

Figure 13. A family squat in the Prague city centre (illustration photo).

Public Administration

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

This was substantially demonstrated in winter 2004-2005 when, in succession, four remote areas were chosen for a temporary winter shelter, but all four district authorities refused the plans. In winter 2005-2006 a temporary winter shelter was set up in rented premises of an empty, privately owned building, but after a short time a populist campaign had set off using xenophobic attitudes and the night shelter was closed. A similar situation (this has not changed since June 200615) surrounds the establishment of a new day centre to replace the one in the vicinity of the Central Station where the rental contract was terminated by the new private owner. The usual argument in objecting to social services for homeless people is describing the location as a “residential area”.

There are obvious efforts to solve the “problems with the homeless” (as opposed to “problems of the homeless”) through persecution, repression, agitation and harassment. Especially local

15 At the time of completion of this report in October 2006.
politicians try to force the homeless out of their territory to neighbouring areas, from the city centre to the outskirts, from the outskirts to the centre or beyond the city limits. To the public, they present the establishment of social services as the cause for an increase in the number of homeless people.

One graphic example illustrating the approach of public administration to the issue of homelessness: The municipal authorities of Prague 5 tried a radical approach to the problems with homeless people. They hired a security agency to guard the pedestrian zone around the “Zlatý Anděl” shopping centre. Three security guards guarded the area of Anděl non-stop from about the end of November until Christmas Eve. (...) But the drunkards, homeless people and street vendors harassing the passers-by have been back at Anděl right from the moment the security guards left. (...) However, the mayor does not exclude the possibility of the security agency's all-year operation. (...) The work of the security agency cost the district authorities 450 000 CZK. At the same time, an NGO was carrying out a commissioned three-month field research among the homeless people, for which the same administration paid 80 000 CZK.

The social service providers can face a dilemma whether and in what way they should cooperate with the local administrative bodies during the screening of a specific territory. The concurrence in the above-mentioned example may be accidental. Results from field research can, however, be easily misused if they get into the hands of a malicious influential person. Another example could also be indicative of this: A short, one-month street work operation was carried out in another Prague district and, during the same period of time, the municipal authorities commissioned the demolition of cottages in abandoned allotment gardens.

Journalists and the press

The media mainly publish reports about homeless people in winter, around Christmas time, and their content is mostly positively inclined towards the homeless. Sometimes, however, the articles have certain political overtones and divert attention elsewhere. During the warmer seasons there is usually less media interest in homeless people which only increases in connection with some sensational news, scandal or controversial statement of a politician. The reactions to articles published on the internet are usually inadequate and often mainly demonstrate the author's character in their use of vulgar language and personal attacks.

On the other hand, newspapers paradoxically reported in December 2005 that four homeless people “froze to death” in Prague17 and in January 2006 a report was published about 10 deaths caused by the cold weather in the entire Czech Republic18 (not just homeless people), while the report from the City of Prague Emergency Medical Service quoted above proves much higher numbers in Prague itself.

Newspapers, especially regional ones, sometimes describe homeless people in a negative way, supporting xenophobic and segregative attitudes towards them. Pejorative terms, such as “vagabonds”, “strange individuals” or “loafers”, are not exceptional. Even nation-wide dailies considered respectable by the public do not refrain from describing homeless people as alcoholics.19

Medical Care

One objective of a two-year joint project of social service providers is to determine the accessibility of medical care to homeless people. An analysis was done of 37 questionnaires returned by hostels. The attitude of doctors was described as the biggest problem (10 responses). Most hostel facilities do not officially cooperate with any doctors, the ones that

16 Veronika Sládková: Freezing weather is pushing homeless people off the streets, in: Lidové noviny 12 January 2006.
17 e.g. Právo 14 December 2005: Lenka Hloušková, Tereza Čapková: “Four homeless men froze in one month”.
18 e.g. Metro 12 January 2006: Freezing weather resulted in ten deaths in the Czech Republic (report issued by Czech News Agency).
19 e.g. MF Dnes 15.8.2005.
do only do so based on unofficial agreements. In the other cases, hostel clients meet with indifferent or even averse attitudes on the side of medical staff in the region.  

Emergency medical services have also been approached and 10 returned questionnaires were processed. According to the paramedics, the biggest difficulty they come up against is handing the patient over to medical facilities, mostly hospitals. There was only one encouraging response from a smaller town, six respondents stated that they sometimes meet with problems. It is alarming that in three significant large cities admitting a homeless person to hospital is a problem every time. The most burdensome thing for the ambulance crew is the difficult administration connected with the absence of personal documents, non-payment of insurance etc.; 6 responses were recorded to that effect.

During the monitoring of the state of health of homeless people in one city district, 132 people were approached (106 men and 26 women), of whom 50 received medical treatment (41 + 9) and 16 were referred to specialists (13 + 3). Many of the squatters neglect their health long-term. At the same time, their way of living excludes them from the regular health care system. Because of repeated experience of being turned down when requesting specific medical help, they do not try to seek professional help even with urgent health problems. The only solution is often the change of an originally trivial problem into a life-threatening state and calling the emergency medical service.

The Ministry of Healthcare is also responsible for the protection of public health, as well as for health care for the homeless (and others), the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. Research carried out by the Institute of Health Policy and Economics (IHPE) has documented a more frequent occurrence of chronic diseases, a higher prevalence of infectious diseases including TB and more frequent problems of mental health. At the same time it pointed out discrimination exerted in the provision of healthcare to homeless people, expressing suspicion that the “right to healthcare, as guaranteed by the state, is not always completely fulfilled” (Barták 2005: 12).

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20 D. Šupková: Analysis of questionnaires from hostels in the Czech Republic, unpublished.
21 D. Šupková: Analysis of questionnaires from emergency medical services.
22 D. Šupková: Report from the monitoring of health state of the homeless in Prague 5.
23 M. Barták: Medical state of the homeless population in the Czech Republic and its determinants II.
Conclusions

The absence of their own legal, physical and social space for their own privacy drives the homeless people to using public spaces for the fulfilment of their personal needs. The occupation of places suitable for the fulfilment of their physical, mental and social needs becomes part of their strategy. This creates an environment for conflicts between mainstream society and homeless people and even for competitive struggles among the homeless in specifically attractive locations. The privatisation of public spaces and the sale and renting out of public areas then draw the owners and leaseholders into the conflicts. The proclaiming of large areas of the city as residential or business areas and the recent gentrification of public spaces only accentuate the atmosphere of conflict by bringing the public administration and its repressive departments into the problem. This is followed by xenophobic statements and requests for segregation from various sides.

We deliberately do not state the names of people or more detailed descriptions or the addresses of locations, which the homeless consider strategic, as the risk of information abuse remains. Cases are known when TV stations (name commercial ones) had shown and accurately described a location occupied by homeless people and subsequently the public authorities or municipal police considered it their duty to “clean up” the place.
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**Internet**


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