

Surveys of homeless persons – continued development of planning basis and strategies

Host Country Report

Vienna Social Fund

City of Vienna – Department 24 Health Care and
Social Welfare Planning

1. Introduction

This Peer Review will not deal with an example of good practice, but is entirely devoted to one issue: 'How can the planning basis for the Assistance to the Homeless be improved?' In Austria, the federal provinces bear responsibility for providing the support measures of the Assistance to the Homeless. Accordingly, the topic of planning is a regional one.

It will be examined what instruments are employed throughout Europe and how planning works in concrete terms. The City and Province of Vienna not only hopes to gain insights through the exchange of good practices, but also concrete results through the joint further development of the existing planning approach. Within the framework of this Peer Review, Austria will report on how the idea for the subject of the Peer Review emerged, what experiences were gained with the last data survey on the situation of homeless persons and what limits the province of Vienna encountered when it endeavoured to develop a forecasting tool for the Assistance to the Homeless.

As stated above, in Austria assistance to the homeless is a social welfare assignment and falls under the competence of the federal provinces. In Vienna, Vienna Social Fund (VSF) bears responsibility for assistance to the homeless. The VSF manages the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless by granting subsidies, among other things, and provides the requisite services for homeless persons in Vienna via 'Wieder Wohnen GmbH' in conjunction with the most varied NGOs.

In recent years, the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless has developed both in terms of quality and quantity. Not only has the number and quality of places been increased, but the range of the offer has become more diverse and more differentiated as regards the different target groups. The offer comprises both low-threshold outpatient facilities, such as daycare centres, and the most varied inpatient forms of accommodation for homeless persons. Besides preventing homelessness (e.g. by providing area-wide housing protection and eviction prevention), a special focus aims at reintegrating formerly homeless persons. Moreover, in recent years the offer of 'socially supported accommodation' has become established, which provides especially people no longer in a position to live in flats of their own with a permanent and also supervised type of housing. Co-operation with the health services (psychiatric/psychosocial liaison service, medical care for homeless persons) has also been intensified.

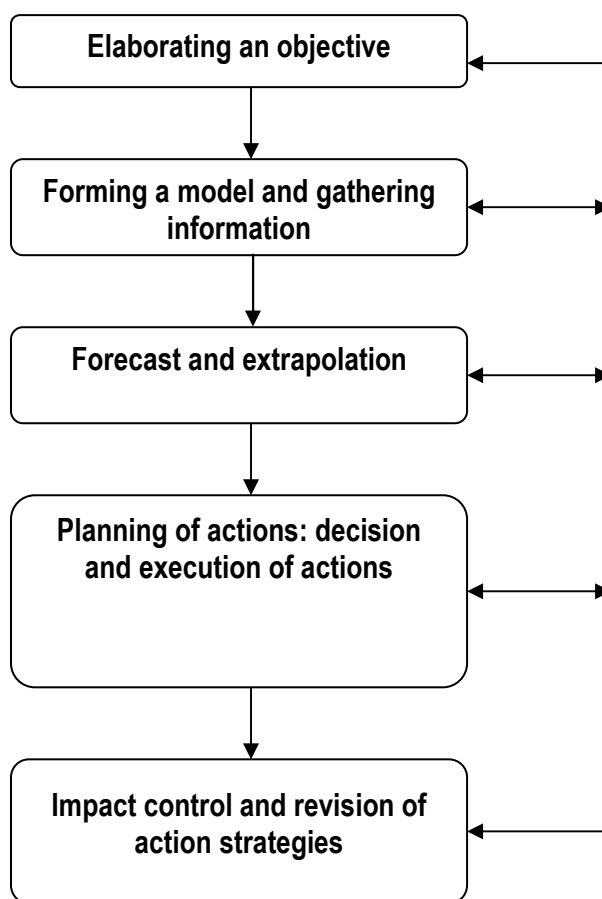
Despite the social housing programme, comprehensive subsidies (accommodation and rent subsidies), efficient eviction prevention and the increased focus of Assistance to the Homeless on integration, the number of homeless persons has risen.

What the reasons for this evolution are, whether they are causally connected to the development of unemployment and/or the housing market, or whether the social background or the offer itself are also responsible are of eminent significance from the planning perspective, since only once the causes have become clearer, can needs for action be identified and suitable strategies and measures developed.

2. Planning to create measures

In its manual for controllers, the International Group of Controlling has the following to say about the keyword 'planning': 'Planning is the intellectual anticipation of possible future solutions, the selection of desirable situations to be achieved (objectives) and the determination of relevant actions that need to be taken to reach those objectives'.¹

This simple definition shows the complexity of planning assignments:²



(After D. Dörner 1992, 67, Fig. 17)

In complex situations, planning initially requires an **objective**. Then **information** is needed, which must be integrated in a **model**. The next step consists of making a forecast, i.e. a picture of how

¹ http://www.igc-controlling.com/EN/_downloads/example.php. Cf. examples from the Dictionary for Controllers.doc (20 August 2009).

² Cf. Dörner, Dietrich (1992), *Die Logik des Misslingens. Strategisches Denken in komplexen Situationen.*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg, August 1992.

things will develop, starting from the status quo. Then thoughts must be turned to concrete **measures**, to whether something should be done and what should be done. As there are often several possibilities for action, **decisions** have to be made, taking future effects into account, and the measures finally have to be implemented. The final task, but by no means the simplest one, is controlling **implementation, observing the effects (effect control)** and then the ensuing **adaptation (revision)** at all stages of planning. In certain circumstances, objectives will have to be concretized or amended, the model redesigned, additional or different information collected, the forecast adapted or new measures taken.

3. Gathering information

Here, it is primarily a case of data concerning the **provision of services** (socio-demographic features of the target group, amount of the payment or length of stay etc). Some of this data is relatively simple to record and quantify (age, income etc.), but other facts (problems, anamnesis etc.) are only insufficiently available or assessable to a limited extent. Further information relates to the **social, economic, political and legal framework** (population development, housing market, unemployment, eviction procedures etc.), **adjacent service fields** (assistance to the disabled, social welfare, psychosocial care, care and nursing etc.) as well as **various information from studies and research work**.

Since 1991, the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless has had a continuous annual report on the social situation of the homeless in Vienna. This reporting system, standardized by the Federal Task Force for Assistance to the Homeless (BAWO) reached a climax in 1999 with the evaluation of a nation-wide survey,³ which was repeated in 2009 on the instructions of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection.⁴ Due to changes of personnel within the BAWO, the Viennese report on the homeless was continued, but no longer further developed. The situation deteriorated when the responsibility for reporting was assumed by the City Administration in 2002, especially as the personnel resources turned out to be inadequate.

In the course of the reorganization of the Viennese social field, the Department of Supported Housing was transferred to Vienna Social Fund as of July 2004. The concentration of several fields of the social sector under one roof generated the need and the demand for a uniform standard of documentation. This was the background and the starting point for adapting the documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. For this reason, in autumn 2004, the staff section Reporting and Development of Vienna Social Fund developed the basic dataset of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless on the basis of the existing questionnaire and defined it as the standard documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. The results of the data evaluation are published in the annual report of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless.

Whereas up to now the social statistical data have been forwarded directly by the facilities to Vienna Social Fund in anonymous form, as of now the basic dataset can be compiled directly and centrally by the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. In the course of its case management procedure and authorization of services according to the Viennese Social

³ G. Eitel, H. Schoibl, Grundlagenerhebung zur Wohnungslosensituation in Österreich. Wohnungslosigkeit und Wohnungslosenhilfe unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Situation von Familien und Jugendlichen. BAWO – Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe. Vienna, 1999.

⁴ Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe: Wohnungslosigkeit und Wohnungslosenhilfe in Österreich. Wohnungslöserhebung 2006-2007-2008. Vienna, 2009.

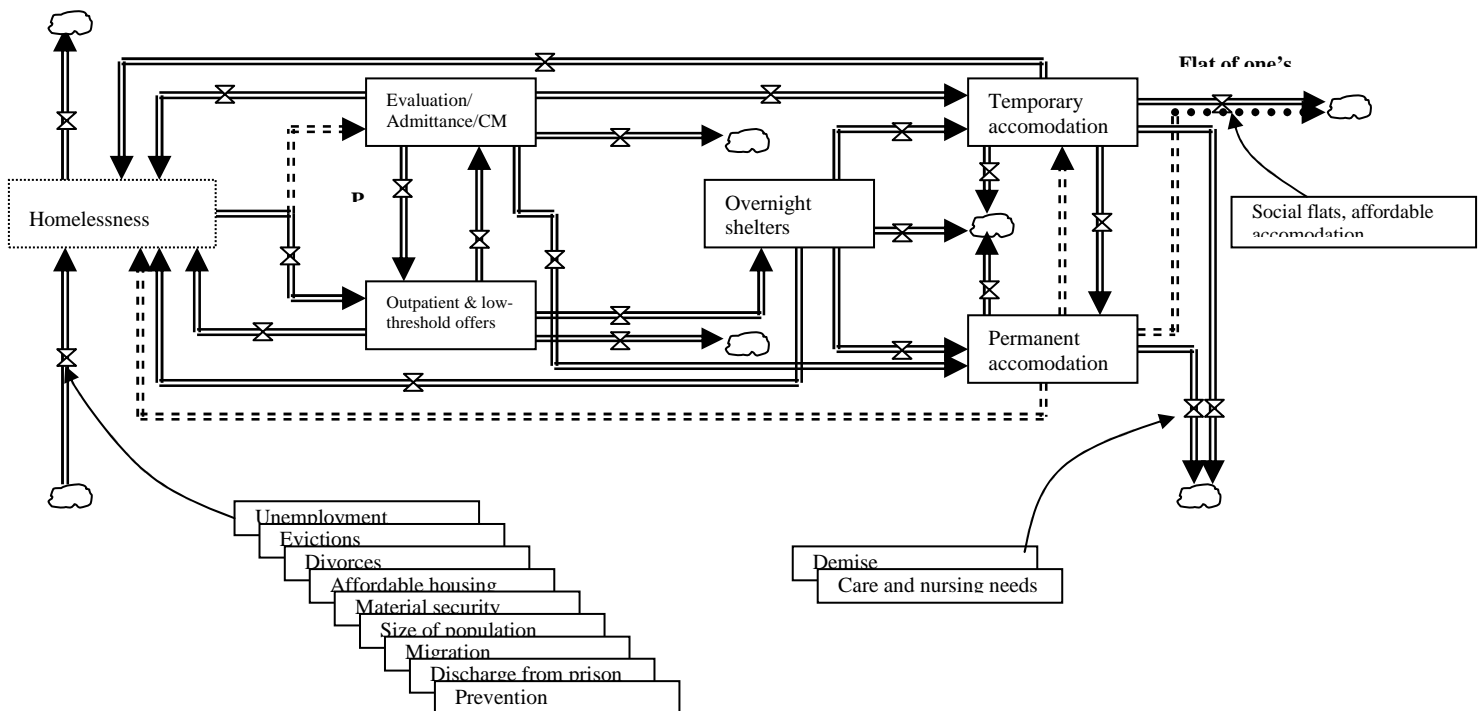
Welfare Act, the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless can collect all the items of the basic dataset. The comprehensive dataset enables the social situation of homeless persons to be described and the effects of the support measures to be presented.

4. Model

Following the structure of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless, the following will demonstrate a model giving an impression of the complexity of planning and the diversity of conditions. The basic assumption is to view the number of homeless persons as a stock figure governed by influxes and effluxes.

First, the somewhat technical presentation of the model as a stock-flow diagram. The symbols used have the following meanings: the little clouds refer to the sources and depressions in the system, about which there is no detailed information, which represent the limits of the system. The rectangles stand for the stock figures, the thick arrows for the flow sizes and the thin arrows for the flow of information or the influence of the system.

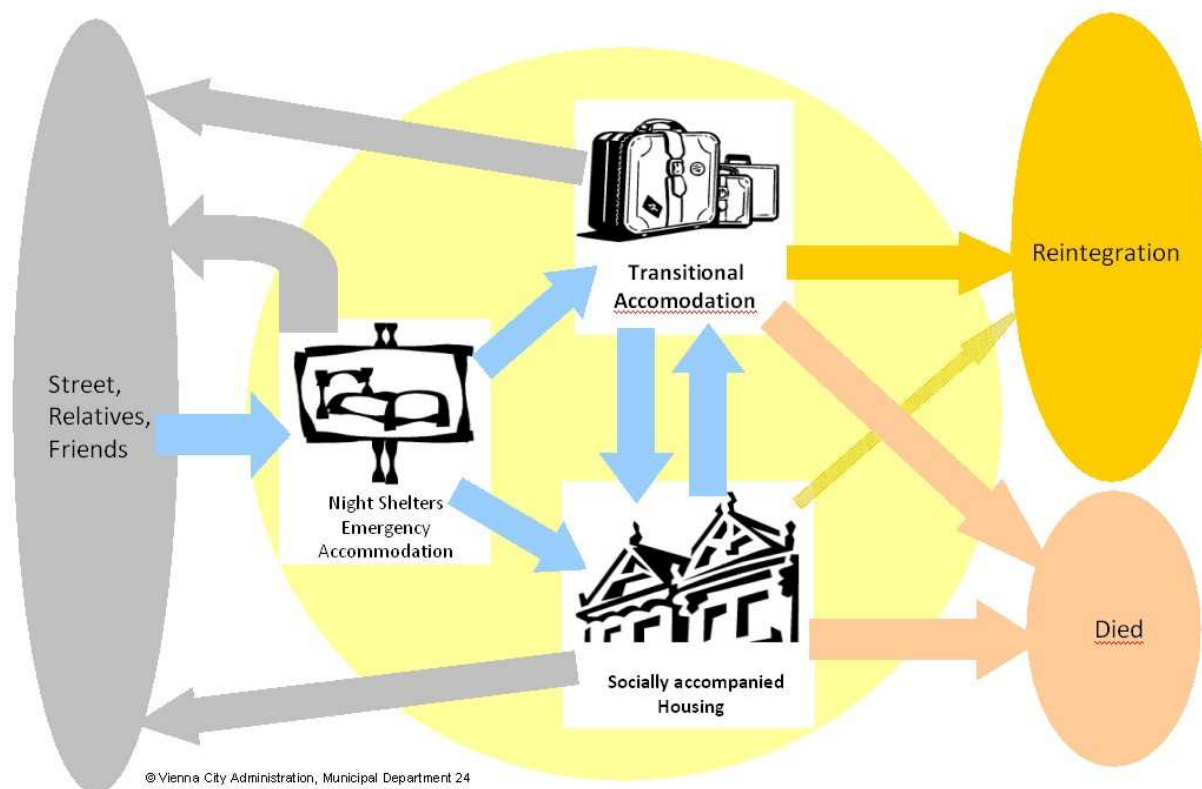
Figure 1 – Stock and flow size model of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless



The stock of homeless persons is fed from the population. As we are viewing the system of the Assistance to the Homeless, this is an intermediate result representing the (variable) maximum of persons to be looked after by the Assistance to the Homeless. Only when they contact outpatient facilities do these persons become clients of the Assistance to the Homeless and thus identifiable

for the support system. Once they have entered the support system, there are different possibilities of counselling and support. If someone enquires about accommodation, he/she steps into the internal system of service approval. If the appropriate housing service (temporary or permanent accommodation) is not immediately available, the person moves into the internal system of overnight accommodation. The many connecting arrows indicate that a change between the different internal cycles is possible any time. What is missing in the presentation is the internal differentiation of the category 'temporary accommodation', which includes different services between which it is also possible to switch. The support system is left via temporary accommodation, once someone has received a flat of his/her own or reverts to the status of homelessness without claiming any further services. The permanent accommodation section of the support system is also left by returning to homelessness, but usually due to nursing care needs or death.

The internal system of the Assistance to the Homeless is presented more concretely in the following figure. Here, too, the many connecting arrows refer to significant interactions between the categories.



As was already indicated by the stock-flow diagram, our information collections show us that the influx from the population is influenced by the most varied factors.

Increasing living costs, debts, low income, addiction, sickness, unemployment, divorce, lack of affordable accommodation change the probability by which persons may potentially be affected by homelessness.

Various structural factors thought to affect the level of homelessness can be grouped under 4 main headings:

- Housing demand and supply;
- Affordability (of housing);
- Unemployment;
- De-institutionalization.

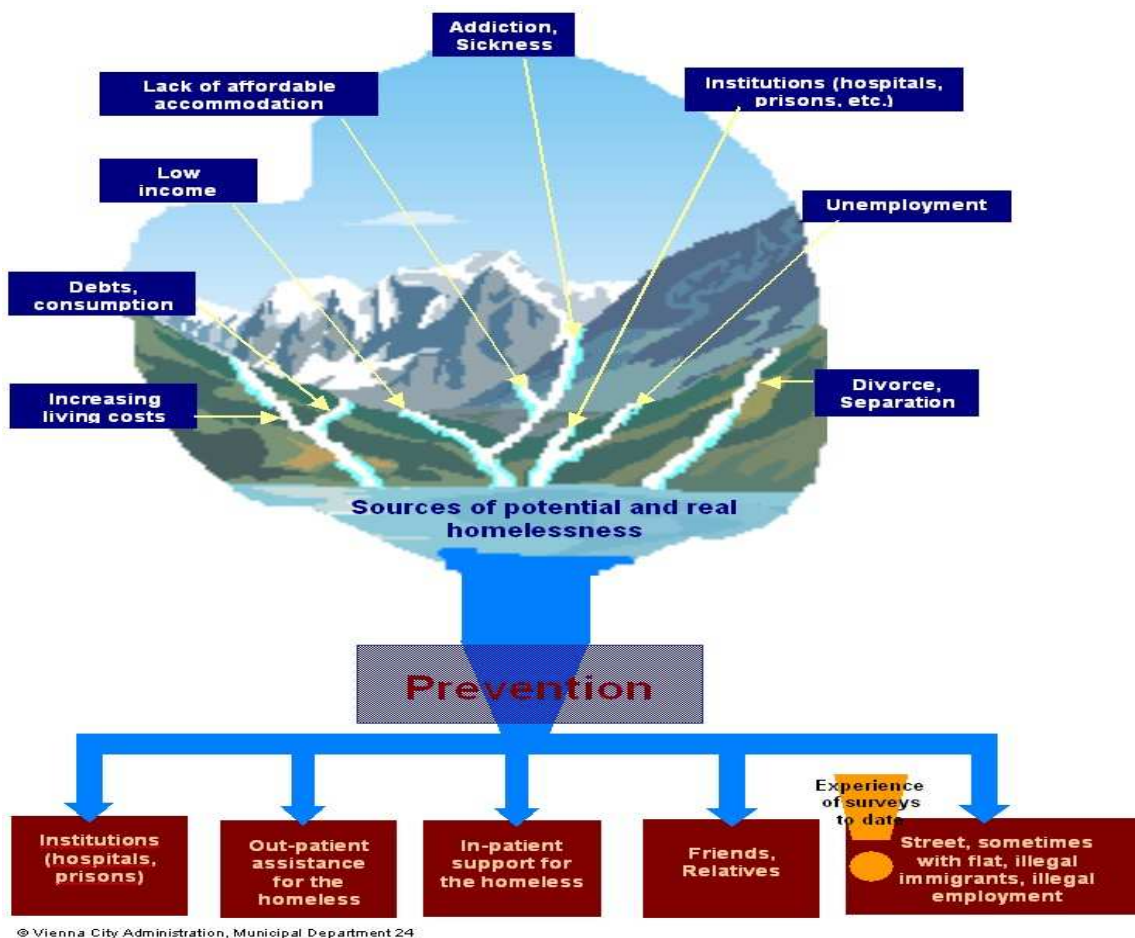
These 4 factors may cause homelessness by affecting:

- the availability of sufficient and suitable accommodation;
- the affordability of available accommodation; and
- the need for social support to enable potentially homeless people to live in the accommodation available and affordable.

On the other hand, individual/psychological or 'behavioural' factors include e.g.:

- insufficient coping strategies;
- mental illness;
- emotional strain;
- addiction;
- family crises.

However, it is important to distinguish between the causes of homelessness presented and the underlying structural causes. The latter provide the context within which particular individuals are unable to cope with an adverse event in their lives. Thus, personal factors and individual behaviour may determine who becomes homeless under unfavourable structural conditions. While behavioural factors may influence why any one individual becomes homeless, structural factors determine the aggregate level of homelessness. In other words, homelessness is likely to result from the complex inter-play between structural and behavioural factors.



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5. Forecast and planning

In Vienna, attempts to take structural factors into account when forecasting homelessness have not proved to be suitable. The statistical analysis of the link between the unemployment rate, divorce rate and court-decreed evictions, on the one hand, and persons looked after by the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless, on the other, was not compatible with the empirical findings. There was a strong, negative correlation between homelessness and unemployment; there was a weak statistical link between homelessness and divorce and none between homelessness and eviction. A negative side-effect could be seen in the high correlation between unemployment and evictions. On the whole, however, the results did not produce explanations.

A decisive factor in regressive models is that utilization of the offers of the Assistance to the Homeless is strongly guided by supply and not demand. All time series in the Assistance to the Homeless illustrate supply and not demand.

Another factor may be that the stock-flow model is still too linear. Does it not behave in rather a way that it expands a single pendulum into a twin or even a multiple-pendulum? A normal pendulum is a typical system governed by strong causality. Similar causes always result in similar effects. This is so reliable that single pendulums used to be used for measuring the time in pendulum clocks. If another pendulum is attached to the arm of the pendulum, this construction produces an unpredictable movement pattern. The twin pendulum is a popular model for

demonstrating chaotic processes, and chaos increases, the more pendulums are attached. The movements can be calculated and even simulation models produced with complicated methods of calculation. Nevertheless, – and we should be aware of this when making forecasts in the Assistance to the Homeless – these calculations are only exact for very short initial periods.

6. Practical experiences

In the practice of the Assistance to the Homeless, mathematical models are currently not employed. We refer to empirical findings and the knowledge and experience of experts. Observations by those involved in operations allow specific trends to be identified. The responses often have to be flexible with new or expanded offers. The result has been the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless with the following topical focuses of activity:

- Improving housing protection.
- Outpatient provisions.
 - Medical care.
 - Daycare centres.
 - Streetwork.
- Temporary accommodation with support.
 - for women.
 - for families.
 - for mentally ill persons.
 - for drug-addicted persons.
- Provision of affordable housing.
- Adequate forms of permanent accommodation.

The endeavours of the City of Vienna to further develop and expand housing protection automatically pose the question as to what effects can be achieved or not achieved and what influence housing protection exerts on the number of homeless persons in the medium and long terms. In addition, there are budgetary requirements necessitating more (effect-oriented) steering and planning. By introducing strategic planning in Vienna City Administration, it is intended to develop new forecasting tools on the basis of planning insights to date, in particular based on the flows into, within and out of the Assistance to the Homeless, to enable conclusions to be drawn about future developments and new options for action (strategies, measures and steering possibilities). It is intended to establish close co-operation between the planning department and those active in operations and those affected and science, also on the European level.

The result of this Peer Review is intended to support endeavours on the European and national levels to co-ordinate the battle against homelessness by suitable planning measures and to improve the situation for the persons affected in all the Member States.