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Re-Orienting the Turin Reception System to Address Homelessness. Findings from an Italian Participatory Action-Research Study

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Abstract_ *This paper presents the initial analytical findings from a multidisciplinary participatory action-research study that aimed to reorient and improve the public services system for people experiencing homelessness in Turin, Italy. Sociologists, designers, and anthropologists from the University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin coordinated the research in agreement with the municipality of Turin and with funding from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The action-research study has been conducted since 2018 through co-design activities and qualitative research techniques that have involved policymakers from the city administration, frontline workers from third-sector organisations, and the beneficiaries of public services for people without housing. This article focuses on some of the critical aspects of Turin's reception system that emerged from the action-research process, such as the tension between the standardisation or personalisation of the city's public services and the need to further diversify the housing solutions available for those facing homelessness. At the methodological level, the collaboration and prolonged discussion between the university researchers and local administration was significant. This action-research study encouraged the actors in the local reception system to develop their reflexivity and promoted the development of more diverse policies and interventions.*

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Introduction and Context

Housing hardship is widespread in Italy due to traditionally limited public investment in housing options. This situation worsened following the Great Recession of 2007/2008 and the subsequent slow recovery, which resulted in the impoverishment of a number of households and persons in need of housing (Baldini and Poggio, 2014; Jessoula et al., 2019). Historically, Italy, like other Southern European countries, has very high levels of home ownership and low levels of social housing and state involvement in housing regulation (Poggio and Boreiko, 2017; Tosi, 2017; Baptista and Marlier, 2019). In this context, the situation of people experiencing homelessness, defined in Italy as being "roofless" and/or "houseless" (ISTAT, 2012; Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2015), the first two macro-categories of the "ETHOS Light" classification (Edgar and Meert, 2005), is particularly critical. In recent years, the issue of homelessness has garnered increasing attention due to its spread and because of the new heterogeneous configurations of housing exclusion and poverty (Consoli and Meo, 2020).

The last national survey on homelessness completed by ISTAT in 2014 launched a debate in Italy on policies to be put in place to address homelessness that would fall in line with the European Strategy EU 2020. The debate involved the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Italian Federation of Organisations Working with People experiencing homelessness (fio.PSD), and various regions and metropolitan cities, and it led to the drafting of the *Guidelines for Tackling Severe Adult Marginality in Italy* in 2015 (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2015). This was a very important step in order to reinvigorate the methods and tools of intervention to deal more effectively with the complex phenomenon of 'homelessness' in Italy. By giving priority to the 'right to housing', the *Guidelines* were the first official document to outline a national programme in the sector and to set referential parameters for regions and municipalities implementing social services for people experiencing homelessness. The *Guidelines* aimed to promote the adoption of a new policy strategy based on the Housing First (HF) and a 'housing led' approach, by overcoming the traditional 'emergency' and temporary accommodation infrastructure.

In Italy, the services to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion have traditionally been driven by an emergency approach; in other words, the prevailing policy has been to 'manage homelessness' by providing temporary shelters and street-based services to meet basic needs (Baptista and Marlier, 2019). In the absence of

national policies and programmes directed toward regulating services for people experiencing homelessness (Lancione et al., 2018; Gaboardi et al., 2019), public interventions at the regional level have been limited and poorly funded, and municipalities have traditionally been responsible for planning, managing, and delivering services, thereby generating an inefficient and territorially differentiated system.[1]

Regional and local authorities promoted the introduction of national guidelines in 2015 and funding as part of the National Plan for Fighting Poverty, which was reserved for support services and initiatives targeted at people without homes, as it allowed for the implementation of a new strategy (Avonto and Cortese, 2016). Thanks to the allocation of structural funds for homelessness that integrated national resources and European capital, as well as the introduction of a national minimum income scheme (Inclusion Income – Reddito di Inclusione) in 2017, many Italian regions and municipalities began to plan and implement a wider range of services, including support for greater social inclusion. The debate on homelessness also stimulated researchers to take a more careful look at the changes in policy paradigms and at services to tackle homelessness (e.g., Bianchi, 2013; Campagnaro and Porcellana, 2013; Porcellana, 2019; Porcellana et al., 2020).

In the context of these recent transformations affecting Italian local welfare systems, this article presents and discusses some core findings that have emerged from a multidisciplinary participatory action-research study in Turin on homelessness service innovation. It was commissioned in 2018 by local authorities and was coordinated by anthropologists, sociologists, and social service designers from the University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin, in agreement with the municipality. The mandate from the municipality was to reorient the local system of public services for people experiencing homelessness in order to improve the well-being of all the actors involved (both social workers[2] and people without homes) by adopting a more comprehensive and integrated approach.

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1 In Italy, the system of service provision varies greatly at the local level. At the national level, the first legislative reference to social policies in favour of persons in serious severe marginality is found in Law n. 328/2000 (art. 28). However, this provision only financed limited interventions in the two years following the adoption of the law. Therefore, it did not introduce wide-ranging public institutional responsibilities for the support of people experiencing homelessness, nor did it guarantee continuity of funding in this area of intervention over subsequent years. Furthermore, with the reform of Title V of the Constitution in 2001 (Constitutional Law n. 3/2001), social assistance policies fell under regional competencies. Italy's regions were thus authorised to draft laws on extreme poverty, while the Government lost its primary role in providing social assistance (Saraceno et al., 2020).

2 By social workers, we are referring to a wide range of welfare professionals.

Through co-design activities and different qualitative research methods, the action-research study involved policymakers from the local public administration, frontline workers from third-sector organisations, and final beneficiaries of public services for people experiencing homelessness. The researchers supported the various actors involved in the local network to provide services for people without homes using a logic of participation and co-design, bringing light to the ambivalences, critical features, and weaknesses in the city's existing supply of services and reception facilities, in order to increase the reflexivity of both social workers and policymakers and to re-think the local service system.

The city of Turin represents an interesting case study because of its long and consolidated tradition of policies against poverty and in support of people experiencing homelessness. It was one of the first Italian cities to establish a municipal office in the 1980s that had the function of planning, managing, and delivering services and interventions aimed at tackling severe poverty and marginality. It was also one of the first cities to adhere to the fio.PSD and to have created, in the 1990s and 2000s, an articulated and differentiated model of shelters and accommodations that corresponded to what many in the field call the *staircase approach.* [3]

Furthermore, in 2014 in Turin, fio.PSD launched the "Italian Programme for Implementing Housing First (HF) in Italy" with the aim of promoting the HF [4] approach by coordinating pilot projects and driving policy change in the homelessness sector (Consoli et al., 2016). The Turin municipality was one of the first to join the Italian HF Network and to take part in the first experimental programme with its own pilot projects. Consistently over the last decades, the city's system of services for people experiencing homelessness has focused its efforts on shifting from a predominantly emergency logic to a greater diversification of services. Furthermore,

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3 The prevailing approach to addressing homelessness in Italy and in Europe can be described as linear: it essentially involves 'progressing' people experiencing homelessness through a series of stages that correspond to different residential services. It is based on the philosophy of 'treatment first', which indicates people experiencing homelessness enter the homelessness service system through drop-in facilities and shelters that have low barriers to entry, and then progress through transitional housing arrangements to settled housing, by adhering to a range of behavioural conditions that ostensibly prove their 'housing readiness'. This approach was designed to prepare the homeless for living independently in their own home (Sahlin, 2005; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007).

4 HF is arguably the most important innovation in homeless service design in the past 30 years. Developed by Sam Tsemberis in New York City, the HF model has found application primarily with people experiencing homelessness with high support needs in the United States and Canada and in several European countries. HF uses housing as a starting point, a prerequisite to solving other social and health problems, rather than an end goal. This is very different from homeless services that seek to make people experiencing homelessness 'housing ready' before they are rehoused (Tsemberis, 2010; Padgett et al., 2015).

it has maintained an important role in coordinating and planning and has been in a key position to bring different public and private actors together to provide more effective responses to homelessness.

In Turin, and across Italy, the use of the staircase approach is widespread, although its limitations are well known (Sahlin, 2005; Pleace, 2011). However, by benefitting from new funds, local authorities have developed some innovative housing projects. The Turin HF approach is not considered to offer merely an 'incremental' change to the system, but to serve as a concrete opportunity for the whole system to experiment with the feasibility of systemic evolution.[5] The participatory action-research study discussed here provided the framework for local stakeholders and social workers to reflect together on this transformation, in order to reorient and improve the system of public services for people experiencing homelessness.

This article is structured as follows: the first section briefly outlines the main features of the local reception system and then goes into detail on the research procedures, activities, and methods used. The second part highlights some limitations of the city's reception system identified through this action-research study, such as the tension between the standardisation and personalisation of services and the need to further diversify housing solutions to better meet the needs of beneficiaries. The third part discusses the new perspectives launched as a result of the investigation of the local welfare system, and traces some of the experiments that are currently in progress in reorienting the services for people without housing. These represent the most concrete outputs of this study. Finally, a brief conclusion discusses the remaining work to be done.

The Participatory Action-Research Study: Procedures and Methods

Homelessness is a complex and multifaceted problem and there is a growing awareness of the limitations of the staircase model. It has become clear that an integrated and comprehensive response to homelessness requires the involvement of a wide range of local actors who play a role in supporting people experiencing homelessness. The service system for people without homes in Turin is mainly

5 This incremental and systemic approach is in line with the perspective suggested by the Housing First Europe Hub in his last publication about the implementation of HF policy (2022). They state that HF programmes are more effective if they are developed considering, and integrating them with, the whole (local) homelessness supporting system: "Housing First works best when it functions as part of an integrated, multi-agency homelessness strategy, alongside prevention, and low intensity emergency accommodation services" (Housing First Europe Hub, 2022, p.5).

public. Indeed, there are many third-sector organisations that actively support the homeless population at the city level, and they receive a fair amount of cooperation from the municipality. However, they are not strictly part of the network of public service actors. The most up-to-date figure for the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness in the city of Turin in 2021 is 2 500.[6] Between 2018 and 2019, the period in which the work of reorienting services began, there were approximately 1 880 people who requested public assistance.

The municipality manages the public service system through the Service for Adult in Difficulty (SAD), which is comprised of policymakers, technicians, and social workers. The main functions of SAD are: i) to support people experiencing homelessness in need of social, economic, and housing help; ii) to manage and organise the emergency shelters (1 577 people hosted in 2019; 1 838 in 2021), temporary housing support system (145 people accommodated in 2019; 174 in 2021), and HF services (40 people in 2019; 70 in 2021); iii) to coordinate actions to enhance the social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness through internships and by providing support for job placements. In addition to this, the SAD acts as a hub at the political level, acknowledging and implementing guidelines and directives, drawing and disbursing funds, observing and monitoring the phenomenon of homelessness within the city, and giving updates and requesting responses concerning the issues at hand.

Temporary and emergency housing is offered inside buildings and housing owned by the municipality. Until 2020, shelters were defined as 'night hospitality houses' because they were open from 18: 00 to 08: 00. In conjunction with the COVID-19 pandemic prevention provisions, today the shelters are open 24 hours a day. HF projects are hosted in public or private housing units. The concrete and operational management of residential accommodation and of services for social inclusion is contracted out through public procurements to non-state bodies that are specialised in working in the social sector and, in particular, with people experiencing homelessness.

This is the system of public and non-state actors that, together with the beneficiaries of these services, has been involved in the participatory process of homeless service re-orientation. This interdisciplinary research group decided to adopt an action-research approach to examine this process. Action-research is grounded on research and analysis and on transformative actions within the context in question. As Müllert and Jungk (1987) discussed, it is characterised by three phases: a 'critical' phase, a 'creative' phase, and an 'implementation' phase. This

6 This kind of data is not public domain. The quantitative data shown below were provided to the research team directly by the Turin Municipality's Service for Adult in Difficulty.

sequence allows those involved in the action-research to imagine different future scenarios, to experiment with ideas of change, and to "reopen possibilities" (Pellegrino, 2019, p.183).

In the present case study, the action-research approach responded to the Turin municipality's transformative aims and to the idea that this process of change relies on contribution from all actors in the system. In fact, action-research necessarily calls for the involvement and participation of the community at the core of the research (Reason and Bradbury, 2008), and it combines intentional transformative actions with the production of shared knowledge and reflections regarding the change (Deriu, 2010). This allows the municipality, and all actors involved, to better understand the critical issues and to explore the potentialities related to the (transformation of the) system.

In line with *service design* literature (Sangiorgi, 2011; Yang and Sung, 2016), the participation of system actors in the analysis process and in the construction of transformative proposals is a fundamental element. In this sense, the work we have carried out aimed not so much at a radical redefinition of the service. Instead, with dialogic and collaborative modalities, we reflected collectively on the system's practices and objectives in order to create proposals for incremental, feasible, and progressive system transformations. This is what Björgvinsson et al. (2012), in the field of participatory design, defined as 'staging' and 'infrastructuring', which is oriented not so much at defining a perfectly performing 'definitive' project as at constructing a common workspace and sharing theoretical and practical tools that facilitate collaboration between actors to develop transformative projects.

To do this, in 2018 the research group launched the study by combining co-design activities and various qualitative research tools, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups with privileged witnesses and with some recipients of housing services. Furthermore, it conducted a series of participatory activities with the various actors of the system: SAD policymakers and social workers, frontline workers, and managers of the third-sector organisations that operate the services.

In the first phase of the research, we aimed to produce a shared vision of the system, identifying any peculiarities and limitations. Subsequently, we focused on elaborating possible transformations of the system that could improve the services to better support people experiencing homelessness and to better recognise and enhance the efforts and commitment of the various actors managing the housing services.

All of the group activities were facilitated by the use of visual devices, such as maps, diagrams, and graphics, as well as presentations and discussions of case studies and role-playing activities. These tools proved useful in making knowledge and experiences within the system explicit, in socialising data and concepts, in facili-

tating the comparison between the participants, and in sharing complex reasonings to create a synthesis that did not simplify and trivialise the various and sometimes conflicting points of view (Tassi, 2009; Meroni et al., 2018). On some occasions, these activities were useful to abstract the participants from everyday working life with the service recipients and to try to make new connections and ideas by comparing their experiences with case studies related to other policy sectors/ categories of recipients.

During this work, the researchers organised several dozen participants into work units, which were led by one of the researchers as a facilitator. The presence of facilitators on the work tables was useful for collecting and organising data and in order to 'feel' the working group, to interpret the different attitudes, glances, feelings, difficulties, and irony among the participants. It was also important to give voice to the more 'silent' actors and to understand if the tools made available to the participants and the methods designed for the group works were effective. In relation to some specific issues that emerged from the participatory process, we combined the group-work activities with in-depth interviews and focus groups in order to also include the perspectives of the actors that were not directly involved in the collective activities, like the beneficiaries of the housing services.

Throughout the process, the researchers collected and analysed the data recovered from each participatory activity at frequent research-group meetings that had organisational and analytical aims. The researchers' different disciplinary gazes and sensitivities intertwined constantly, both to guide these processes and during the analysis phases, producing articulated, complex readings that resulted from a dialogic synthesis of the different disciplinary observations. The results that emerged served to establish the themes and objectives of the subsequent participatory meetings. The visual tools facilitated the analysis and synthesis work within the research group and were fundamental to the collective reporting activities and for sharing the intermediate results with the various groups of actors.

In general, the participants recognised the process to be an opportunity for confrontation between entities who viewed each other as competent bearers of experience and reliable points of reference on policies and services for people experiencing homelessness, even though the relationships between these actors could be competitive in nature (as in the case of private social entities periodically competing for tenders for services) or of a client/supplier nature between managing non-state bodies and the public administration. In this sense, the municipality's decision to involve third-sector entities to reorient the public service – enhancing their experience in the field and recognising them as experts – opened the way for a reflective, critical, and imaginative approach to the diverse actors involved. This made it possible to overcome, even if temporarily, the positions linked exclusively

to specific social and institutional roles, giving all participants the opportunity to express themselves not only on the fundamental aspects of the system and on the difficulties of their daily work but also with a proactive emphasis on change.

This action-research study developed in four macro phases. The first had the objective of mapping the system (Lenskjold, 2011), both in terms of the function and articulation of the different system services and in terms of the mandates of the various bodies involved. During this phase, the researchers also analysed how the social workers intercepted and redefined the diverse characteristics of the recipients in terms of their economic, social, relational, and health issues and in relation to the resources and weaknesses of the services offered. This step aimed to problematise how the rules and regulations of service impacted the perception and definition of the beneficiaries.

The second phase focused on investigating certain characteristic and problematic nodes in the system, including: the effectiveness of the actions envisaged to support users in emerging from the condition of homelessness; the integration with other citizen welfare services; and the ability to respond to some of the beneficiaries' relevant needs that were not fully addressed by the current system of services (e.g. access to food, stay in reception facilities in case of health-related needs, the accompaniment of people leaving temporary housing services).

The third phase was instrumental in defining the strategic drivers for the possible reorientation of the service. The researchers identified diverse directions for transformation, but they all aimed at a greater degree of autonomy and self-determination for people in a state of homelessness and at soliciting the system to respond in more adequate and flexible ways to their citizenship rights. Finally, the fourth phase, which is still in progress, entails experimentation with some projects presented by various non-state bodies engaged in the fight against homelessness in response to a 2019 public notice.[7] The public notice called for proposals for projects and was written by the SAD starting from the defined and shared transformative solicitations that emerged in the third phase.

The next section offers some observations and critical reflections that emerged from the first two phases of the action-research study. The last part of the article then discusses how the system is prototyping its transition towards innovation.

7 http://www.comune.torino.it/bandi/pdf/files/servsoc/abitatlav/Scheda_2_Area5.pdf.

Findings on the Local Homelessness System in Turin

The first phase of the action-research study included a participatory mapping activity. The map helped visualise the entire reception system, as the various services are often not completely aware of the links between the different constituent entities. As some of the participants remarked, it "was a way to recognise each other." At the same time, the mapping activity offered local service actors the opportunity to identify and debate some critical issues in the system. In this sense, the map created a 'common ground' on which the participants could agree, express different perspectives, and discuss issues, concerns, and contrasting views. One particular issue emerged during this activity: there was a tension between the standardisation and personalisation of housing services, and concerns regarding the ability to actually emerge from a condition of homelessness through the housing service system in place.

The tension between standardisation and personalisation

The first issue on which the participants agreed is related to the unavoidable tension between standardisation and personalisation in the welfare systems (Dubois, 2009). Since the creation of the welfare state, standardisation has both offered protection and been a problem for the people it supports. On one hand, standardisation protects welfare beneficiaries because it enables them to receive support without having to prove that they deserve it or making them dependent on social workers' discretion, attitudes, or personal will (Dubois, 2019). On the other hand, it tends to make services, measures, and recovery projects difficult to adapt to individual lives, goals, and needs.

This participatory action-research study highlighted that the Turin system was based mainly on the *staircase approach*. According to this model, beneficiaries should advance through progressive steps from low-threshold structures to first- and second-level structures, where they are expected to demonstrate, develop, and increase their autonomy in several dimensions (e.g., house chores, the ability to pay bills). Researchers and practitioners have debated the limitations to the staircase approach at length, as it has been the core pillar of 'housing readiness' for some time (Sahlin, 2005; Tsemberis, 2010; Pleace, 2011). The local actors involved in this study acknowledged them as well. The system mapping activities provided a way to overcome the staircase approach, though the methods identified are not easy to implement in daily practice, even if the HF approach is now part of public services for citizens experiencing homelessness, creating a tension between the *status quo* and the new model.

During one of the system mapping sessions, a local policymaker suggested overcoming the representation of the system through 'steps', much like in the staircase model, because the system was moving towards a softer structure. Instead of the many steps of the linear staircase model, the policymaker suggested two main 'clusters' of services: a 'low threshold' cluster and a 'first-level' cluster. HF was a third cluster, the narrowest, and it was drawn in the map as crossing the former. It was envisaged as a solution to be activated from the first moment a person appeared to be in need and as one that would accompany them throughout the entire time they benefited from the welfare services (Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Padgett et al., 2015).

This graphic representation was not solely an accurate description of the system, but it expressed the desire of those who worked in the Turin reception system to move toward a more flexible system of services. While drawing the map, the participants agreed on the current emphasis on standardisation. They recognised that standardisation might result in the failure of individual projects and generate frustration among all the actors involved, mainly because it forces them to underestimate the effective living conditions of recipients and their backgrounds. Indeed, the social workers voiced that, in their daily tasks, they had to propose solutions selected from "a limited range of available resources rather than following the needs/desires of the beneficiaries." The needs of the person at the centre of the system tended to remain 'on paper' (Leonardi, 2019). This desire for greater personalisation and flexibility contrasts with a serious difficulty in translating it operationally. During the participatory activities, the social workers stated that "it is impossible to imagine a project that differs from the pre-established ones" and that "the projects activated always follow a unique direction." To sum up, in daily practice, the Turin service system tends toward standardisation, and people experiencing homelessness have to adapt to the rigid shape and rules of the system.

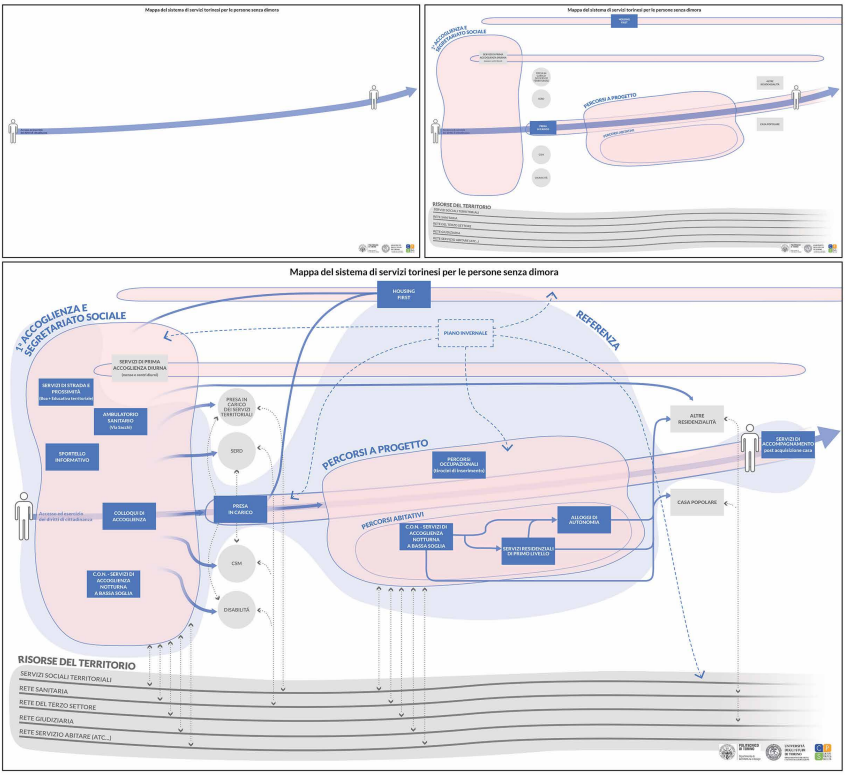

Image 1. *The images represent the outcomes of the mapping activities. The mapping activity was initiated using the first image on the top left, which shows the path of the individual person experiencing homelessness, up to the exit from homelessness. The second image is the result of the first phase of work. It is remarkable that the policy-makers, from the very beginning, represented the person's pathway through services without using the classic staircase representation but by identifying two main clusters of services: the low-threshold services, at the beginning of the pathway, and the first level housing services. Note how the HF cluster on the top was represented with a smaller size but across the whole pathway. In the last graphic the two clusters were filled in with the respective services/actions in blue and the links between the system of services for persons experiencing homelessness and other public services in grey (socio-educational, health, legal, housing) have been represented.*

The following sub-sections examine two factors that emerged from the action-research study as enhancing and maintaining standardisation: what we call 'institutionalised procedures' and the 'homogeneity of solutions'.

Institutionalised procedures

The first factor that contributes to the standardisation of the system is represented by what we call 'institutionalised procedures'. The organisation of the system is based on eligibility criteria and operating rules defined in a standard way to ensure equity in access to public services, as stated above. However, the rules often become 'procedures'; the system follows them, with few opportunities to reflect upon or to discuss their original meanings and aims. In some cases, they thus become 'institutionalised procedures' to work *according to*, not to work *with* or to reflect on.

The strictness of rules and criteria is even more critical considering the wide heterogeneity of the population experiencing homelessness. Its diversification in recent years has increased due to impoverishment, migrations, labour market transformation, and the tightening of migration policies (Consoli and Meo, 2020). Moreover, social workers recognise this strictness in their work: they tend to focus on people's features that fit in the service eligibility criteria, rather than considering the beneficiaries' other characteristics.

During the analysis, this element emerged often in the interviews with people experiencing homelessness and through long-lasting participant observation within the system. Those who directly experienced the contradictions generated by these institutionalised practices were in the best position to challenge and question them, unlike the social workers who were often accustomed to working with the rules. For instance, during an interview, R. told us that he had arrived at the services after his small enterprise went bankrupt. At that time, he was evicted from his house and was living with his dog in a garage equipped with a bed and a toilet. He had a specific aim: he wanted help finding a new job. However, to benefit from the support of the local service system, he had to follow the standardised path: he had to sleep in the shelters and go to soup kitchens. This solution added new problems to his situation: he could not (and did not want to) bring the dog to the shelters, so he had to cross the city every afternoon to take care of the dog. "A place to sleep was the only thing I had and didn't need", R. stated during the interview. He asked for a job or a house, but the standardised path could not match his needs.

The requirement to reside in shelters and other sites is an example of an 'institutionalised procedure'. It was originally designed to ensure that (insufficient) resources were directed to those who were *truly* homeless. They must sleep in shelters because it is a way for the reception system to prove that people are *really* unhoused (Leonardi, 2020). This rule, however, does not recognise the specificities of people's individual backgrounds and lives or the legitimacy of their opinions, requests, and preferences. From R.'s point of view, the garage was an unsustainable long-term housing solution – the reason why he requested support – but it was

better than a shelter. This requirement also ends up assigning resources in an ineffective way, forcing a person to occupy a bed that they do not need as an inevitable criterion for being able to receive other types of support.

This regulation has become an operating practice, a key element of the framework for intervention, and one that is taken for granted. However, the participatory process discussed here has opened space for reflection, as it has created concrete opportunities for discussion between social workers and other professionals involved at different operational levels. Moreover, it has allowed participants to debate key welfare and social service features, such as shelters. Through recourse to co-design tools and qualitative research methodologies, it has also given voice to people without homes, who often have less power in the system.

A unique exit point

While the experiences of homeless people were fundamental in focusing on institutionalised practices, the views of the social workers highlighted the second major discussion point: the homogeneity of solutions. They recognised the need for the system "to propose differentiated [recovery] educational projects, according to peoples' features, desires, opportunities, and will." They stated that they struggled to develop personalised projects because they had access to too few and too homogeneous kinds of resources in terms of housing, jobs, and social domains. From their points of view, the lack of resources prevented the construction of more personalised projects for inclusion instead of a standardised path for all recipients.

An example the participants discussed was the case of the final departure from the reception system of shelters. Almost all people experiencing homelessness who succeed in exiting the service system end up gaining access to a social housing apartment. This is perceived as the most accessible housing solution because it is almost the only affordable solution, considering this population's typical income and because it is a permanent solution. However, there are no alternatives for those who do not want a social house and, above all, for those who do not have the criteria to access the social housing candidate dwellers' directory. For instance C., a middle-aged man interviewed in a Turin shelter told us "I'm stuck here [in the shelter] because they don't know how to help me. I have a debt with the ATC that I can't solve." Indeed it is not possible to benefit from social housing for those who in the past contracted an unpaid debt with the regional agency (ATC, the Territorial Agency for Housing), which manages the social housing units.

Moreover, the uniqueness of this final 'successful exit' dictates the path of people experiencing homelessness in the services, and ultimately affects the whole system. To explain how this works, it is useful to return briefly to the participatory mapping; the participants expressed criticism towards the similar size of the two

clusters – the 'low threshold' cluster and the 'first-level services' cluster – in the graphic representation. In their opinions, the 'low threshold' cluster was significantly larger than the 'first-level services' group. Indeed, in Turin's service system, the 'low threshold' services attract a wider number of resources and host more people than the 'first-level' cluster services. Due to the differentiated occupancy of the two levels, Turin's system of services works as a funnel: a lot of people can be stuck in 'low threshold' services for several years, or never even access the 'first-level services' aimed at housing autonomy.

However, this is not just a question of resource allocation but also of a lack of other types of affordable housing solutions for people who do not match the requirements for access to social housing. Often, they are not allowed to advance beyond the 'low threshold' services; they then get stuck in the shelters because, if they move to a first-level structure, they could occupy it for an undetermined time, with no need to exit, putting them at odds with the principle of the staircase model (Leonardi, 2019). This creates a situation where the 'low threshold' services are overcrowded and cannot respond to the increasing demand for support, while, in the 'first-level' services, not all the places available are fully booked.

During this action-research study, the participants highlighted and reflected on both the problem of the homogeneity of resources available for people who had access to these services, and on its critical outcomes. They expressed their desire to shape a local network with more diverse resources in order to increase the opportunities for individuals in need, to create a wider and more inclusive network, and to overcome the limitations of the current homelessness system in Turin.

Beginning from these findings, the next phases of the participatory process have created opportunities to imagine different future scenarios and to test new solutions.

A System in Transformation

As mentioned, a creative third phase and an experimental fourth phase have followed the first two critical and analytical phases. In the third and fourth phases the public-private-academic group adopted more transformative and change-oriented postures. The interdisciplinary tools and methods remained the same as in the previous phases. At this stage, the researchers used them to promote a more generative reflection, to mould possible transformations, and to analyse the outcomes that emerged from an implementation perspective.

Despite the obvious freedom in design, the team focused on concrete, actionable, and feasible solutions and options for change. The results of the third and fourth phases, respectively, were: a system of drivers for service reorientation, and two

experimental projects with services aimed at housing support. The latter are complementary to the existing housing solutions, and several local third-sector organisations are experimenting with their prototypes and will identify and share their findings on the strengths and weaknesses.

The transformative drivers for the reorientation of the system respond to the needs and requirements for the well-being, self-determination and social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness. However, they do not neglect the quality of work or the functionality and effectiveness of the system. They seek to qualitatively define a change of framework and identify its prerequisites. They also contribute to questioning institutionalised procedures, one of the major problems that emerged during the research. The drivers translation into concrete actions and new services, which are oriented by these very axes, is in the hands of the different actors of the territorial system. They must move within the system, according to its limitations and the freedom and autonomy their roles grant and prescribe. The transformative drivers across the range of needs of persons without homes and the priorities established include: the need to multiply the housing solutions in order to lighten the reception pressure within shelters and to guarantee greater well-being for all; to protect the right to housing adapted to the abilities, possibilities, and will of every person; the full exercise of the right of self-realisation, self-esteem, and security; to welcome each individual in a personalised way and to integrate them into other city welfare services; to strengthen the actions for social inclusion; to increase investments for primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention work; and to provide access, in non-stigmatising forms, to goods and material aids that supplement the weak public economic support measures. Each individual and their right to self-determination and status as one citizen among many is the heart of this vision of change. Moreover, all the actors agreed on the need for a new logic by which to frame the relationship between the person experiencing homelessness and the local welfare system to better support populations in need.

Prototyping the change

The availability of public funds to support these experiments and easier access to these funds, especially compared to the traditional contracts through which public services have been entrusted, has made it possible to launch the creative and experimental implementation steps of this participatory action-research study. This phase is currently underway, and its objective is to design and test service solutions that, in compliance with the agreed transformative framework, respond to the unmet needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The municipality of Turin, in the framework of the co-design process for welfare services, has promoted a call for projects in favour of the homeless population that aims at "the inclusion of citizens in the challenges of paths of activation, capacita-

tion and well-being, and to counteract, in parallel, the different forms of stigma that risk affecting the paths of exit from the condition of serious social marginalisation."[8] Within this co-design environment, which involves social services, health services, third-sector bodies, associations, social cooperatives and voluntary realities, foundations, and ecclesiastical bodies, this research study group identified several transformative areas through which to promote projects and innovative synergies that aim at:

1. An increase of opportunities to exercise the right to domicile for homeless citizens, guests in dormitories, or on the street, by offering a wider and more diversified housing resources inspired by the principle of rapid rehousing (Cunningham et al., 2015; Byrne et al., 2021).

2. Secondary prevention and social inclusion interventions to address the chronic status and deterioration of living conditions within the welfare services, with particular attention to the preservation and exercise of skills and abilities.

3. Experimental projects of tertiary prevention (Culhane et al., 2011; Dej et al., 2020) aimed at supporting citizens who have gained access to housing but who, if not adequately supported, risk 'falling back' into the previous condition of marginality and losing their homes.

In these creative and implementation phases, the work the research team has done is twofold. At first, we supported participants in defining the transformative drivers according to previous critical readings and the state of the system, in order to orient the organisations towards developing their proposals for innovation. In the next phase, which was particularly crucial for the scalability of the projects, we experimented with new services by collaborating in them, monitoring their impact on beneficiaries, and by evaluating the effectiveness of the projects and the economic sustainability of these proposals with respect to the costs the municipality faces.

The team paid particular attention to the proposals concerning new experiences of supported housing; we recognised their novelty and their ability to equip the system with additional and alternative tools to those present in the current binary system, which is split between the staircase approach and the HF model. Indeed, the projects inspired by the principles of rapid rehousing and tertiary prevention were unprecedented solutions for the local system and thus seemed to warrant a critical reading and participant observation. The results and the words used to tell the human and educational experience suggest that the directions of change under-

8 With these words the aim of the call for project promoted by the Municipality of Turin was presented.

taken are viable and promising; they respond to persistent problems and seem to offer concrete answers to the challenges people experiencing homelessness face, precisely by working to move away from the standardisation of the system.

These experiments also removed some of the economic 'alibis' that have seemed to curb the drive for innovation. In this way, they nourished the design capacity of the participants in a context of collective and communal work. They also made it possible to concretely experience change and to drive it. Above all, they have allowed us to see people experiencing homelessness within new contexts of life and new possibilities in order to empower and support their rehabilitation.

Conclusion

Most generally, we can see how useful participatory action-research has been for the innovation of the local system. We believe that this work has laid the foundations for an effective transformation of the system, particularly with respect to the expansion of housing options that go beyond the standardisation of accommodation services and support services at the end of the persons' pathway.

This study has shown that all the actors involved wish for a transition to more person-centred services that seek to promote better living conditions and more personalised designs and social inclusion. Nonetheless, the feasibility of this transition is less immediate than the will of people and operators represents. Indeed, the limitations, contradictions, and difficulties in the system become most apparent when they are challenged. This also shows how systemic the resistance to change is, as resistance is rooted in the same behaviours, ideas, and stereotypes that the system promotes, often unconsciously or framed as a need for precaution and care for the people.

However, this action-research has also made it possible to detect a collective awareness of these sources of resistance and, above all, a desire for concrete, participatory change. From the mapping, interviews, focus groups, and roleplaying, and through the discussion and analysis of the results and limitations of this study, we found words of appreciation for the diverse community of social workers who confronted each other in an open way, who valued difference, and who recognised the centrality of the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

A final observation concerns the interdisciplinary contribution of social science and design discipline. In general, the interdisciplinary approach has proved fundamental in driving the public administration to give form and substance to the various phases of the complex service reorientation process. In particular, it has been useful in combining an analytical and critical approach with a design

and transformative one, in order to stimulate processes of change within the service system in terms of ideas, perspectives, and practices. The research activities here were particularly useful in constructing a vision of the system that the actors recognised and shared, identifying the relationships among them and with other territorial services, bringing to light the strengths and limitations of the system, and defining the transformative goals. This work of understanding and sharing awareness and reflexivity is the first step in generating change. Still further, the interdisciplinary approach helped stimulate the idea in all actors that change was not only necessary but possible, defining the concrete ways the system could be reoriented to take new shape. To do this, the team encouraged the design of punctual and innovative projects, aiming not so much to transform the services already in place, but to increase the opportunities for people currently serviced by the systems. The experimental nature of the projects pushed the policymakers and social workers involved to pay greater attention to their progress through processes of verification and collaborative monitoring alongside the researchers, with the aim of understanding whether they could be adopted as real services and become a permanent part of the system.

This incremental approach of continuous design, testing, and monitoring can also ensure that the reorientation of the system results in a steady process over time that can respond more dynamically to the challenges, both old and new, that homelessness continues to pose.

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