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Barriers to the involvement of NGOs working for the benefit of the homeless in the housing policy process

Abstract

This article analyses the barriers experienced by representatives of non-governmental organisations in the process of deliberations on the subject of homelessness. In this paper, I investigate two deliberation forums, one in Brussels (La Strada) and the other in Warsaw (the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness, or SDCH). The article argues that the development of housing policy measures aimed at reducing homelessness is hindered by barriers impeding social actors who work for the benefit of the homeless from participating in the process of creating and implementing housing policy. As reported in the article, three types of barriers were found to be at work in both deliberative forums: (i) financial barriers, (ii) formal and legal barriers, and (iii) 'relational' barriers. The analysis shows that the barriers identified in Brussels may be related to the limitations of the corporatist model of social dialogue in the field of homelessness. The barriers observed in Warsaw may be associated with the lack of established traditions of deliberative practices and with certain features of Polish culture.

Key words: Brussels, homelessness, housing policy, Warsaw, policymaking process

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Introduction

In the social policy literature, the issue of deliberation[2] in the field of homelessness remains understudied. Despite the growing interest in exploring the process of deliberation on homelessness (regarding the collaborative governance for homelessness policy in Vancouver, Doberstein 2016; within the framework of county collaborative plan design in US, Lee et al., 2018; or in the context of the debates on the siting of a homeless shelter in US, Thurber, 2017), relatively little is known about the operation of the deliberative forums in European countries, especially in a comparative perspective. However, there is a body of evidence showing that, despite the existence of deliberative structures involving non-governmental organisations working for homeless people to shape housing policy[3] in Brussels and Warsaw, policy insufficiently addresses the problem of homelessness in both cities (Opolski et al., 2017; Ryckmans, 2019; Verstraete et al., 2018). One factor negatively affecting the development of housing policy measures aimed at reducing homelessness may be barriers hindering the participation of social actors[4] in the policymaking process (Durant, 2019; Wojciechowski, 2018). The article explores and analyses that issue.

The paper contributes to the understanding of social policy in two main ways. First, it examines the barriers to a democratic and participative public policy process (Bua & Escobar, 2018) in the context of the important social issue of homelessness (Burrows et al., 1997). Second, it complements research tools while taking into account the historical context of policy analysis. The article uses the "long view" perspective developed for housing studies by Kathleen Flanagan, Keith Jacobs (2019) and Tony Manzi (Jacobs & Manzi, 2013). A "long view" perspective adds to the research perspectives used in social policy to study historical conditions of institutional rules and the behaviour of social actors in the policy-making process (an example of such a study informed by historical institutionalism is Tomasz Inglot's 2010 work on the development of the welfare state in East Central Europe). A "long view" perspective complements the research tools applied in the studies based on comparative historical perspective by "theorizing unconventional forms of welfare production" (for instance, Hendrik Moeys' research on social policy development in Belgium, 2019). Allowing the broader context of social phenomena to be captured, the long-view perspective is particularly suited to the comparative study of certain aspects of housing policy. However, it does not treat history as a factor determining social reality. Because housing policy is very politicized, this approach helps to take a deeper look at and to better understand social actors' impact on institutions involved in housing policy.

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[2] Deliberation is a public process of communication oriented toward searching for adequate arguments in favour of certain assessments of and solutions to the issues in question (Sroka, 2009, p. 28).

[3] Housing policy "is the set of government interventions that have a critical and measurable effect on the performance of the housing sector" (Angel, 2000, p. 11).

[4] Social actors include people, social groups and institutions which have an ability to act through entering into interactions with other entities (Birkland, 2011 and Szmatka, 1998).

The paper begins by outlining the framework guiding the analysis (the "long view" perspective). It then examines the research methods (Martin Reisigl's politolinguistic approach to discourse analysis and Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) comparative research strategy) and findings of the original empirical study. The paper ends with an overview of the most significant conclusions from the research presented.

Theoretical background: the 'long view' perspective

The conceptual lens framing the study is the "long view" perspective, which provides "theoretical and methodological guidance in relation to unpacking the present" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277). Flanagan and Jacobs argue that "the long view involves developing 'a historical sensibility', which is something quite different from providing 'a description of a sequence of events'" (Flanagan & Jacobs, 2019, p. 195). A "long view" perspective is "shorthand for historical and comparative forms of investigation that more effectively inform thinking on focus, scope, ambition and mechanics of contemporary policy interventions" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277).

Jacobs and Manzi (2013, p. 29) highlight the significance of the social context, including tradition and history, for adequate interpretation of contemporary housing. As they write: "We argue that it is not possible to interpret housing in hard times without considering a wider historical context. In particular, contemporary policies need to be understood in the context of earlier attempts to promote local-level activity and weaken the capacity of local government" (Jacobs & Manzi, 2013, p. 30). They state that "explanations of social change that take insufficient account of the local and historical contexts in which politics is enacted will only have limited heuristic utility" (Jacobs & Manzi, 2013, p. 41).

Jacobs and Manzi stress that "pursuing a historical analysis enables an understanding of housing which takes account of both structure and agency and acknowledges the ideological and practical barriers to reform. Such an analysis sheds light on both the constraints upon and opportunities to develop coherent reform strategies" (Jacobs & Manzi, 2017, p. 18). Flanagan and Jacobs refer to Norbert Elias's call for greater consideration of the historical context in research carried out in social sciences (1987). They agree with Ian Cole's assertion that housing studies "neglect longer run trajectories of social, economic and cultural change" (2005, p. 284). Flanagan and Jacobs recognize that housing policies are "temporally situated, contingent and contextual" (2019, p. 196). But they acknowledge that the theoretical perspectives are also "products of place, time, context and politics" (Flanagan & Jacobs 2019, p. 196). They argue that within a comparative research strategy, "a long view can reveal the common challenges that arise across time and space" (2019, p. 199).

A "long view" perspective has been developed for research that examines: (1) housing policy outcomes (it is helpful for understanding the context of "the reasons why particular outcomes have not yet been achieved, despite long and concerted efforts to do so", Flanagan & Jacobs 2019, p. 195), (2) housing policy ideas, (3) "the shortcomings of easy assumptions about cause and effect" related to housing policy (Flanagan &

Jacobs 2019, p. 196), (4) the origins of the institutional settings of housing policy and (5) "a longitudinal view of social and housing problems" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277).

A "long view" perspective is useful for an analysis seeking to "map patterns of cumulative effects over time" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277). It involves three research strategies: (1) "to distinguish key moments and sites of transformative change with wide-reaching cumulative effects from those with little or no impact"; (2) "to locate the analysis of policy development in a firmer analysis of enduring cultural, social and economic changes"; and (3) "to retrace the history of emergent problems and prompt a rupture from dominant, taken for granted ways of understanding" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277). The research procedure is often based on discourse analysis, case study and in-depth interviews.

Research strategy

This paper applies a comparative case study of the barriers experienced by representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGO X[5] in Brussels and NGO Y[6] in Warsaw) in the context of institutions enabling the deliberative involvement[7] of social actors in the housing policy process[8]. These institutions include, in Brussels, La Strada and in Warsaw — the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness. La Strada (*Centre d'appui au secteur d'aide aux sans-abri/ het steunpunt thuislozenzorg Brussel*) was founded in 2001. The formal and legal framework for the La Strada operation is set out in the 2009 regulation (Arrêté ministériel, 2009). The institution is subject to the Common Community Commission (COCOM). La Strada has a wide range of activities: (1) acts as an observatory of the issue of homelessness, (2) provides information on forms of homelessness prevention and (3) is a forum for participation and consultation in matters related to homelessness. The Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness (*Branżowa*

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[5] The name of the institution was anonymised. In Brussels, NGO X has been operating since 1999. Its goal is to offer the homeless help in the form of accommodation, medical assistance, meals, access to showers, psychological support and social worker support. The organisation also undertakes activities aimed at supporting the homeless in getting out of homelessness. NGO X coordinates help for the homeless in winter. This organisation represents non-governmental organisations in La Strada. It is the largest organisation working on homelessness in Brussels.

[6] The name of the institution was anonymised. In Warsaw, NGO Y has been operating for almost 20 years. Initially, it was headed by a clergyperson, and from 2009 by a layperson. The organisation provides help for homeless men in the form of accommodation, social worker services and a wide range of integrating services. The NGO Y has also invested in a training apartments program for those who climb out of homelessness. This organization supports the integration of homeless people in the labour market and their efforts to obtain municipal housing. This is one of the largest organisations working for the benefit of the homeless in Warsaw. It has performed important functions within the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness.

[7] Deliberative involvement is linked with the notion of deliberative democracy as "an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members" (Cohen, 1997, p. 67).

[8] Housing policy process is "the combination of basic decisions, commitments and actions made by those who hold or influence government positions of authority" (Gerston, 2010, p. 7).

Komisja Dialogu Społecznego do Spraw Bezdomności) is the successor of the Warsaw Welfare Council, which was established in 1992 at the initiative of Mother Małgorzata Chmielewska. Since 1993, the Council has been operating under the patronage of the Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw. The name of the institution was changed in 2004. It is an initiative and advisory institution (it gives its opinion on City initiatives on homelessness). The Committee aims to represent non-governmental organisations before the City and Province (*Voivodeship*) authorities, to share experience, cooperation and to support.

I argue that these bodies of housing deliberation ostensibly exhibit the features of different political and socio-economic contexts related to the specific historical trajectories of the cities (Brussels and Warsaw) and countries (Belgium and Poland) in which they are located. However, they share the goals (including fostering deliberation and public participation in the housing policy process concerning homelessness) and face problems in achieving these goals. These institutions have not yet been compared in the context of the deliberation process in housing policy. Comparing these bodies particularly as concerns barriers experienced by representatives of non-governmental organisations working for the homeless is important. Both institutions operate in cities with significant homelessness[9]. This makes it essential that NGOs exchange both experience and knowledge on the problems they encounter in the housing policy process.

The research procedure was divided into two stages. The first focuses on "the mapping of the present". To reiterate: the aim of the study is to discover the point of view of the NGOs. Selected aspects of Martin Reisigl's politolinguistic approach (2011, p. 151–183, developed in the scope of Ruth Wodak's perspective on critical discourse analysis) were used in the research. This approach was adapted to the needs of the research, but particularly to select the criteria for gathering data (representativity/typicality, impact, validity, uniqueness, redundancy, Reisigl, 2011, p. 163). In the course of the research procedure I examined legal acts, policy strategies and press articles on the subject of involving NGOs in decision-making processes in the housing policies of both Brussels and Warsaw. These data are useful in learning about the historical and administrative-legal context (I referred to the concept of "a historical sensibility" developed within the "long view" perspective). I then conducted seven individual in-depth interviews with housing policy stakeholders in Brussels (four interviews) and Warsaw (three interviews). The interviews were conducted with organisations in Warsaw in April 2018 and with organisations in Brussels, in June 2018. Participants were chosen using a procedure to maximise participation of potential respondents. The goal was to avoid bias and to create a multilateral view. The data mainly concern critical reception and political control of the involvement of social actors in the housing policy process. I followed the rules adopted

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[9] In Warsaw, the number of people who are homeless is estimated at 2,500–3,500. A survey from 2017 indicated 4785 homeless people in the Mazowieckie Voivodship (most of them lived in Warsaw) (Sprawozdanie z realizacji działań na rzecz ludzi bezdomnych, 2017, p. 24). According to the research conducted by La Strada, in March 2017, there were 4,094 homeless people in Brussels (Mondelaers, 2017, p. 59).

in the Polish Sociologist's Code of Ethics throughout the interviews. After collecting and reviewing the data, I formulated the following research question: what barriers do NGOs working for homeless people face in the housing policy process in Brussels and Warsaw (as exemplified by the organisation analysed)? To answer that question, I analysed the interview transcripts, focusing on the arguments that appeared in the opinions of social actors. I tried to reconstruct the positions of social actors from Brussels and Warsaw who had referenced the barriers. I focused on the opinions of representatives of selected non-governmental organisations operating in the two cities (NGO X and NGO Y). I identified three categories of barriers hindering the involvement of NGOs working for homeless people in the housing policy process at La Strada in Brussels and the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness in Warsaw: (1) financial barriers, (2) formal and legal barriers, and (3) "relational" barriers. Despite various welfare state regimes and housing policy systems in Brussels and Warsaw (Kleinman et al., 1998), the observed barriers were very similar.

The second stage of the research procedure locates the analysis "in a firmer analysis of enduring cultural (…) changes" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277). It required a more in-depth and critical look at the findings of the first research stage (Reisigl, 2011, p. 158). My aim was then to understand the similarity of selected aspects of the housing policy process in two different cities and countries. Due to the comparative nature of the study, the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) was used. MDSD is a comparative method developed in political science (comparative politics) by Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune (1970) to capture similarities between the units of analysis coming from different socio-economic and political contexts (Anckar, 2007). It is helpful to compare "cases that are maximally different on all but the variable of interest" (Otner, 2010, p. 570). My analysis rests on two cases only, and they have not been maximally heterogenic. For these reasons, my study focuses on better understanding the phenomenon to be explained (the barriers to the involvement of NGOs working for homeless people in the housing policy process in Brussels and Warsaw, dependent variable). My task was to conduct a thorough analysis of the barriers. In order to perform the MDSD analysis of the data, I identified two sets of variables related to the phenomenon of interests — "the present" and "the past". Within the first set of variables I compared the cases in the context of selected characteristics of the welfare regime[10] and housing situation[11]. The cases differed across these factors, and the irrelevant ones were eliminated. I then compared the cases within the scope of the second set of variables, which consisted of the selected factors related to the development of housing policy[12] and the development of political involvement of social actors in the

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[10] Rank in the Human Development Index, public social spending, working people still in poverty, children lived in relative income poverty, unemployment rate, percentage of the population living in a household where the total housing costs represent more than 40% of the total disposable household income.

[11] Percentage of renting, rent prices, social housing stock, quality of housing (overcrowding, housing utilities).

[12] The historically shaped political and legal framework of the housing policy.

housing policy process[13]. I observed that the cases were similar with regard to the factor related to the development of political involvement of social actors in the housing policy process, and chose that one as the independent, explanatory variable. I then formulated the following hypothesis: (1) despite the significant tradition of negotiations in Brussels' public policy under the corporatist social consultation model, such a solution is ineffective in fighting homelessness, and (2) the weak position of non-governmental organisations in the Warsaw housing policy process in the field of homelessness can be ascribed to the lack of democratic involvement of social actors in the policy process traditions. These hypotheses should be verified in further studies. The MDSD comparative research strategy (as I use it) does not allow for the formulation of generalisation.

Findings: Barriers identified by representatives of selected NGOs participating in the housing policy process in the field of homelessness

According to Jacobs and Manzi, "it is not possible to interpret housing (…) without considering a wider historical context" (2013, p. 30). Indeed, housing activism has a long history in both Brussels and Warsaw. In Brussels, one of the first manifestations were the strikes carried out by factory workers in 1886 demanding better housing conditions. In the 20th century, housing activism was undertaken by trade unions and political parties as well as urban movements. Brussels was known as "the city of a hundred neighbourhood committees" (Delasi, 1980). In the 1990s, social movements gained greater importance. There were organisations acting for the benefit of homeless people (*sans-abri*), illegal immigrants (*sans-papiers*) and squatting movements. Afterwards, the housing issues were included in the postulates of tenants' movements and of organisations working to reduce the problem of the high number of evictions (Degryse, 2013).

In Poland, the first social organisations defending the right to decent housing conditions came into being in the first half of the 20th century. Housing demands were later included in the "Solidarity" programme. Since 1989 and the fall of communism in Poland, tenants' movements have gained in importance in housing activism (Audycka-Zandberg, 2014; Kostka & Czarnota, 2017). Another area of housing activism is squatting movements (Polanska & Piotrowski, 2015), while urban movement activists have also taken up housing issues more generally (Vargas-Tetmajer, 2016).

In both Warsaw and Brussels, however, a push towards institutionalisation of deliberative practices in the housing policy process did not start until the 1990s. In Brussels, publication of the General Report on Poverty in 1994 was a key event in the push to have the voices of homeless people and their representatives included in the process of policymaking (Francq, 2007, p. 98). The first institutional homelessness deliberation forum (La Strada) was established in 2001. In Warsaw, the Social Dialogue Committee

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[13] The historically settled context (limitations of traditions of social dialogue) of the public participation in the housing policy process.

on Homelessness continues the activities of the Warsaw Welfare Council, which was established in 1992.

Pursuing a "long view" analysis helps one to understand that housing policies in Brussels and Warsaw are "temporally situated, contingent and contextual" (Flanagan & Jacobs, 2019, p. 196). In the case of Brussels, a point of reference in shaping the mechanisms of participation of social actors in decision-making processes regarding homelessness may be a labour market model of social dialogue (it was a kind of "matrice d'un processus d'institutionnalisation de ses structures paritaires de négociation", Francq, 2007, p. 98). Bernard Francq argues that the 1994 General Report on Poverty postulated the broadening of corporatist social consultation in settling the problem of poverty (Francq, 2007, p. 98). Francq recognises that "it is this model that different institutions have sought to develop in their social policies" (Francq, 2007, p. 98). He states that "this model was used in the collective bargaining system to capture the problems concerning poverty, minimum basic income (minimex), inequalities in access to culture, education, health and housing" (Francq, 2007, p. 99). This feature of the Belgian public policy process contributed to the inclusion of Belgium in the corporatist model of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 2007, p. 73, 92–93). Housing researchers also attributed the Belgian housing policy (of which homelessness policy is a part) to the corporatist housing regimes (typology of Barlow and Duncan, Doling, 1997, p. 115). Within this corporatist framework, it was recognised that an important principle of a democratic political system is to transmit to the social actors the social and political decisions that should be negotiated between them (Faniel & Paternotte, 2015). That social actors possess agency is important. Their ability to mobilise resources and defend the interests of the social groups they represent is valued. The pursuit of consensus is appreciated ("un modèle de concertation sociale", Francq, 2007, pp. 98–108). The consensus sought by social actors is not only a socially desirable feature of the democratic political system, but also an established practice.

However, 'the mapping of the present' provided data on the limitations of the homelessness aspect of current housing policy. Representatives of the NGO participating in the housing policy process in the field of homelessness within La Strada (Brussels) identified numerous barriers which have made it difficult to achieve a similar quality of corporatist social dialogue in the field of housing policy related to the issue of homelessness than in the labour market policies. One they pointed to was the problem of the NGO's financial dependence on the City/Regional authorities. They indicated it was difficult to be critical of the City/Regional authorities, who have subsidised the organisations to a large extent. This reluctance limited their ability to express critical information and opinions. Thus, it restrained the transfer of knowledge (from the practitioners to policymakers) and thus negatively affected the potential of necessary adjustments of legal and formal solutions to the changing social needs to be made (interview no. 3, B (Brussels), 2018). Within this context, the problem to be solved is:

> *the research independence of La Strada. The matter of conducting research on the specific topic is contingent upon the agreement of politicians being obtained (who are members of the La Strada*

Supervisory Board — A. Z.-C.). As a result, the research that is sometimes conducted is not the most important that could be, from the point of view of the needs of the homeless. This also limits the critical aspect of research. (interview no. 3, B, 2018)

The issue of limitations of the NGOs' "subsidized liberty" in policymaking addressing homelessness was also noted by Bernard Francq (2007, p. 107).

The need for flexibility of regulations defining the 'rules of the game' has also been recognised. In Brussels, attention has been paid, particularly among new, small organisations such as DoucheFLUX, to the "deterrent" effect of the procedure for accrediting relevant non-governmental organisations by approval (*agrément*), which is necessary for their participation in deliberation (under La Strada) (interview no. 3, B, 2018).

Finally, the most important group of barriers are the "relational" ones, two aspects of which can be distinguished. The first concerns the relations between non-governmental organisations working in the field of homelessness. In Brussels, much has been made of the problem of the "lone leader", a term that can be used to describe an organisation that has gained such a strong position (justified by the size of the services provided and the quality of its work) that it dominates the relations between the non-governmental sector and the City/Region:

We entered the sector brutally. We were a bit violent towards the sector (…) I would say that for about fifteen years, we had a relationship between the sector and (…) (our organisation — A. Z.-C.), which was based on our strength. That is, if we could impose our projects, our point of view, our vision, we did it and did not consult (…). This was due to the inertia with which we were meeting. We call this "social imperialism". We had the dominant position in the sector. It also allowed us to have a better position in relation to political decision-makers. (…) For 15 years (...) we did not give too many opportunities to consultation instruments. Let's be clear. We came and tried to impose our point of view. (interview no. 2, B, 2018)

A sense of threat to their then autonomy and fear of the unknown (new regulations) prompted this organisation to influence the City/Region authorities in order to delay the establishment of the institution coordinating deliberation (La Strada) (interview no. 3, B, 2018). However, within the framework of institutionalised forms of deliberation in Brussels:

Our consultations almost always work under consensus. Voting is very rare. (interview no. 3, B, 2018)

The second aspect of "relational" barriers concerns the relations of non-governmental organisations with the City/Region. In Brussels, it was pointed out that the opinions and recommendations of non-governmental organisations are not sufficiently taken into account by the City/Regional authorities. There are many tensions between representatives of NGOs and government officials:

the controversial aspect is the comments and recommendations formulated during the consultations. This more or less generates tensions with political decision-makers. It isn't an open conflict, but a constant tension. It concerns the publication of research results or decisions on conducting

research. (…) Our goals and achievements are being questioned by public authorities. Especially since the beginning of the migration crisis (…). (interview no. 3, B, 2018)

This confirms Francq's observation that in the field of homelessness, the social consultation model is unwieldy. It is not known who is responsible for what at which level of consultation (local, regional, federal) (Francq, 2007, p. 104). As he states: "'free' negotiation between social partners ultimately commits no one" (Francq, 2007, p. 103). It was emphasised that politicians set the direction of the deliberation:

Currently, the direct impact of deliberation on policy is minimal. Politicians influence the directions of action and the sector must adapt. (…) However, participation slightly indirectly affects policy. In the case of the reform, which was voted on 15 days ago, its text was consulted. Changes were made, but this didn't affect the reform of the direction that was desired by the homelessness sector." (interview no. 3, B, 2018).

A Brussels NGO indicated that the sector had become politicised:

From the beginning (...) (our organisation — A. Z.-C.) has had a strong political connotation. They were people who belonged partly to the Socialist Party (…). (interview no. 2, B, 2018)

Relations with politicians of a particular political orientation may cause serious concerns as to the lack of political neutrality of the NGO and its openness to people with political views that do not accord with those professed within in. This matter deals with the specific characteristics of housing — "the wobbly pillar under the welfare state", as Torgersen called it in 1987 — which sees political dispute over the scope of public authorities' intervention in housing more frequent than in other areas of the welfare state. It also reflects the issue of "pillarization" (Huyse, 1984). Numerous organisations' activity and place in the housing policy process can be seen as a consequence of their links with a specific segment of society (French-speaking, Dutch-speaking, German-speaking, and Catholic, socialist or liberal). The governance structure of the NGOs reflects the importance of this factor. The historical links between one French-speaking NGO and the French-speaking Socialist Party have been scrutinised in connection with a financial scandal involving the socialist politicians and the former mayor of Brussels (Tripoteau, 2018). Politicians were suspected of receiving pay while being members of the board of that non-profit organisation financed by donations from citizens. This situation led to a discussion about changing the governance model in NGOs dealing with homelessness.

According to the "long view" perspective, understanding the nature of housing policy institutional settings shaped by cultural changes means "unpacking the present" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277). The historical context and the data together suggest that within the La Strada (Brussels), NGOs financed mainly by local and regional authorities are not an equal partner in policy process deliberations. Relations between social partners are different in the area of labour market policy than in policy addressing homelessness. The position of social partners is far weaker than that of trade unions in collective bargaining on the labour market. Despite the significant tradition of negotiations in public policy,

such a solution is ineffective in fighting homelessness. Despite the established tradition of social negotiations, however, taking into account the diversity of dimensions of social life remains a challenge. Relations between social partners are also different in labour market policy than between social actors working in policy addressing homelessness.

With regard to the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness (SDCH) in Warsaw, I have placed the issue of barriers experienced by representatives of non-governmental organisations in the deliberative process of housing policymaking in a broader historical context.

I found that SDCH activities reflect a Polish concept of political involvement of social actors that could be interpreted as derived from the tradition of the "Nobles' Democracy" of the 15th–16th centuries (Bartkowski, 2011). That tradition affords all stakeholders equality and the opportunity to participate in the discussion on governance. Of course, these are desirable features of a democratic political system, but which are not reflected in the consolidated practice of deliberation and consultation in many dimensions of social life. The discrepancy between the historically shaped understanding of democracy, with deliberation and inclusiveness, and its application results from the limited experiences of the democratic political involvement of social actors in Poland. In the recent history of Poland, the political practices of the socialist political system (the socialist People's Republic of Poland, Olech, 2013) have widened this discrepancy. Freedoms and political rights were significantly limited, so the models of democratic and deliberative practices did not develop. However, that changed with the 1989 political and economic transformation, which enabled the democratic political involvement of social actors in Poland to grow. Unfortunately, the marketisation and privatisation that occurred on its heels meant that a few elites gained at the expense of the many: most of society was plunged into unemployment and poverty for many years, a state that could by no means be considered conducive to participative political and social life.

It has been observed that the values upon which Polish culture is based differ from those coming from cultures in which the ideas of deliberation arose. Elżbieta Wesołowska sees little potential in Poles' values and beliefs (including a small distance to authority — Poles easily question authority and expect to participate in decision-making processes; cultural assumption of gender equality — Poles belief that men and women are equal or a pro-social goal orientation), and many cultural barriers to the dissemination of deliberative democracy procedures (2013, p. 103). Andrzej Zybała highlights the reluctance of Poles to cooperate and to think analytically (2016).

In this context, "the mapping of the present" provided data on the limitations of the current housing policy in the field of homelessness. NGO Y representatives identified numerous barriers to participating in the housing policy process in the field of homelessness within the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness (SDCH) in Warsaw. I argue that they are a symptom of the lack of maturity and the consolidation of deliberation in the traditions of Polish democracy. To take one example, and as the following quotation illustrates, it is difficult to obtain public funding for the activities of non-governmental organisations:

This is the behaviour of somebody who is in a position of strength, but we just will not give in. Because we are fighting for more than just money. Anyway, it (…) is the professional habit of Directors of many Offices, sometimes, that they behave as if they were giving out the money from their own pockets. This is the money of the citizens. (interview no. 1, W (Warsaw), 2018)

Zybała links this with an important feature of Polish culture — a difficulty in working towards the public good or focusing on collective interests at the expense of individual achievement (2016).

An overly formal approach to cooperation between non-governmental organisations and the City has also been observed. A City representative often refers to the pressure of the 'rules of the game' that apply to them. Non-governmental organisations cannot present postulates concerning housing policy to higher-level political decision-makers. During the discussion, these demands are *a priori* criticised and rejected by the (low-level) City representative (interview no. 1, W, 2018). This confirms Zybała's observation that public institutions in Poland are still very reluctant to use deliberation techniques (2016).

Finally, there are 'relational' barriers regarding in relations between non-governmental organisations with the City/Regional authorities. It was highlighted that:

Recently, we went to a meeting with the Office Director and Deputy Director, and it turned out that "we are against administrative decisions." We are not against administrative decisions. We have been talking about this for three years. We say that we want to talk about how they will be implemented. (…) We talked about it for a very, very long time and it turned out that we were left out of the dialogue process. We were suddenly presented with a fait accompli. (…) We have reports from our meetings and now the question is whether the Office Director reads them at all? No! They have no idea! (…) We would like a mediator to be sent to our meetings (…). (interview no. 1, W, 2018)

This illustrates Wesołowska's argument that Polish culture imposes difficulties in cooperation with strangers who do not belong to the group defined as one's own, and which can be explained by low social-trust indicators (2013). But at the same time, the NGO Y easily questioned the decisions of authorities and expected to participate in decision-making processes. This may be ascribed to the influence of "Nobles' Democracy" (Bartkowski, 2011).

In Warsaw, it was in particular pointed out that the consultations are treated by politicians as a formality:

This is such an apparent dialogue. People come. They express their frustrations. Therefore, they will not come out with torches on the city (…). They do not form a coalition around them that will simply come out and fight. (…). (interview no. 1, W, 2018)

The opinions expressed by members of the NGO suggest that the need for approval of the hierarchy of social organisations and institutions exerts a negative impact on deliberative practices, and is maintained in Polish culture (Wesołowska, 2013). Politicians and officials are reluctant to share power with other social actors.

Referring to the "long view" perspective, I tried to understand the nature of the barriers observed in the housing policymaking, and to "unpack the present" (Wetzstein, 2019, p. 277). In the light of what I uncovered at the SDCH, I put forward a hypothesis that the weak position of non-governmental organisations in the housing policy process in the field of homelessness can be ascribed to the lack of democratic involvement of social actors in the policy process traditions. Due to difficult historical experiences, deliberative and participatory democracy understood in relation to the tradition of the "Nobles' Democracy" is very slowly finding expression in the practices of social actors. Participation has not occurred widely in the system of housing policy, as housing policy is based on hierarchy and sectoral terms. As in Brussels, the dependence of non-governmental organisations in Warsaw on policymakers (in terms of funding and control) is also problematic. It makes it difficult to establish partner relations in the process of participation.

Conclusion

This article concerns barriers hindering the involvement of a selected group of social actors (non-governmental organisations) acting for the benefit of homeless people in the housing policy process in Brussels and Warsaw. I have attempted to show the point of view of NGOs. Based on an analysis of the data obtained through in-depth interviews conducted in Brussels and Warsaw, three types of barriers were distinguished: (1) financial barriers, (2) formal and legal barriers, and (3) "relational" barriers.

With regard to the first group of barriers, NGOs depend on political decision-makers for subsidies. This tends not only to diminish the expression of critical opinions on the policy of the City/Region authorities, but to also restrict the knowledge transfer that occurs between practitioners and policymakers. Financial dependence limits the research independence of institutions coordinating participation. The financial transparency of non-governmental organisations can also be problematic, particularly as concerns remuneration of board members who are politicians.

The second group of barriers is the formal and legal framework for participation. Too demanding "entry procedures" discouraged small non-governmental organisations from participating in institutionalised forms of deliberation. A very formalistic approach deprives cooperation between non-governmental organisations and the City of innovation and flexibility. A city representative too fixated on the regulations in force can block the transfer of information and postulates from non-governmental organisations to their superiors. It was pointed out that when a city's or region's political and administrative structure is overly complicated, deliberation is limited.

In the case of the third group of barriers ("relational barriers"), NGO involvement in the housing policy process may be limited by the strong position of one organisation when it becomes "a lone leader". Such an organisation will dominate the relationship between the non-governmental sector and the city/region. Other organisations then find their influence on the housing policy process limited.

I have highlighted that problems may also stem from the relations of non-governmental organisations with political decision-makers. It was pointed out that the opinions and recommendations of non-governmental organisations tend not to be sufficiently taken into account by the city/regional authorities. Sometimes, politicians try to control the direction of deliberations. Politicians have treated discussions with non-governmental organisation as a formality. Politicians tend to require simple acceptance of the proposals they present. Deliberation in the housing policy process is also limited when stakeholders have unequal positions and unequal access to resources. Non-governmental organisations acting for the benefit of homeless people were treated as applicants and service providers. The reluctance of representatives of policymakers to enter into an interdisciplinary approach, requiring innovation and non-standard activities going beyond rigidly defined administrative competences was problematic. Finally, the NGO sector has been politicised. Too close relations between NGOs and politicians can raise many doubts.

The analysis has confirmed that there are similarities in terms of barriers to the involvement of NGOs in the housing policy process in the field of homelessness in both Brussels and Warsaw. The historically settled context of the development of political involvement of social actors in the housing policy process in Brussels and in Warsaw can explain the observed similarity of barriers. In the case of La Strada in Brussels, the barriers can be viewed through the lens of limitations of the corporatist model of social dialogue. The barriers observed within the Social Dialogue Committee on Homelessness in Warsaw are due to a lack of established traditions of deliberative practices and with certain features of Polish culture, particularly the difficulties in cooperation and in working towards the public good.

Acknowledgements

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