

Deconstructing Homelessness: People, Place and Policy

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A Little Context & Presentation Overview

- Social and Cultural Geographer
- Interest in social justice
 - Working with migrant communities
 - Geographies of opportunity
 - Geographies of education
- Community engaged research
- Research action-ability
 - Policy impact?
- Sensitive to scale:
 - Local, regional and national contexts
- Project Overview
 - Context
 - Aims and Objectives
 - Research Questions
- Literature Review
- Methodology
 - Participants
- Tentative Findings:
 - People
 - Place
 - Policy

Project Overview

- Engages a multi-stakeholder approach:
 - contemporary national policy
 - mediated non-profit (or NGO) campaign perspectives
 - community and social worker experiences
 - Voice of the homeless person
- Project aims to make a significant contribution to Irish policy interventions on homelessness (and its associated legislation and action plans) in addition to challenging societal perceptions of the homeless experience.



Project Aims and Objectives

- Review existing national policy in Ireland to consider a typology of homelessness prioritised as part of recent policy interventions.
- Examine how the prioritisation of certain types of homelessness is represented and maintained through the media campaigns.
- Explore the experiences of community and social workers engaging homeless communities in Ireland.
- Record and analyse the homeless experience as it exists in Ireland today, focusing on the local level and considering the influence of place in the life-stories of those currently labelled homeless.
- Coalesce the multiple stakeholder perspectives to challenge linear and narrow perceptions of what it means to be homeless in Ireland. **This aims centrally to communicate the need for a more nuanced understanding of homelessness as a lived experience.**

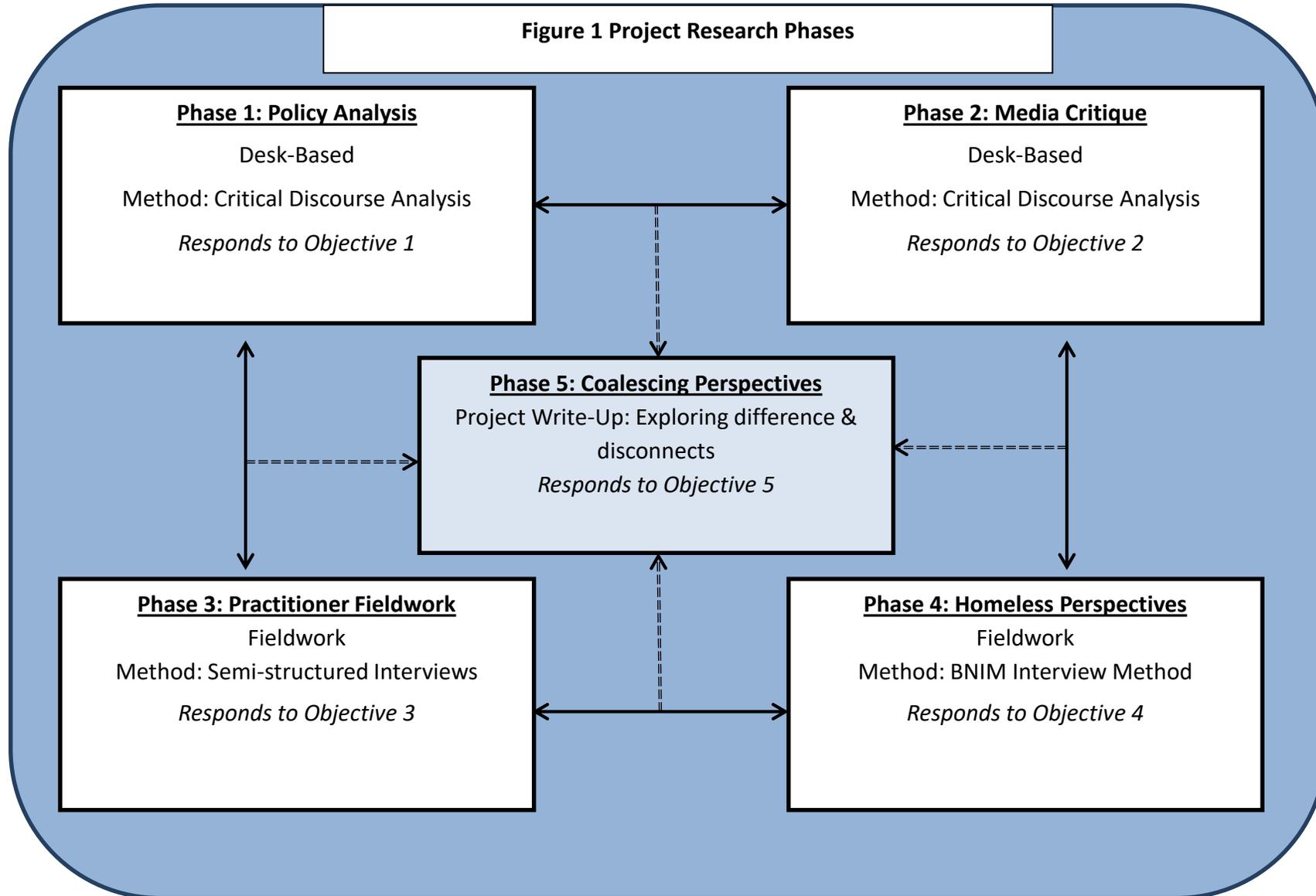
Project Research Questions

- Within contemporary national policy what 'type' of homelessness is prioritised?
- Within the media campaigns of NGOs working in the homeless sector, how is the homeless person represented?
- What are the challenges facing community and social workers engaging homeless communities in Ireland?
- Being mindful of the different homeless typologies (as indicated in FEANTSA's ETHOS framework), how is homelessness experienced in contemporary Ireland?
- What differences, disconnects and inconsistencies emerge throughout the discourse of stakeholders? By extension how can project findings be harnessed to challenge narrow perceptions of what it means to be homeless?

Project Methodology

- Qualitative project engaging multiple stakeholder perspectives
- **Desk-based:**
 - Policy analysis
 - Media campaigns
- **Fieldwork:**
 - Four case-study sites: Galway, Limerick, Cork and Dublin
 - Challenge Dublin-centred narratives of homelessness
 - 24 interviews with community and social workers (across four sites)
 - 16 interviews with homeless people (across four sites)

Project Methodology



Tentative Findings: People and Place

- **Social Capital:**

- Importance of the local network
- Importance of the local network's relationship with the national context

- **Timing issues:**

- Challenging the relationship between NGO sector and state bodies
- Bureaucracy and getting things 'over the line'

- Frustrations with the state **definition** of homeless

- Questions relating to who counts?

- Frustration with the **lack of capacity** both in terms of beds and support services (in the context of a homeless crisis)

Tentative Findings: People and Place

- **‘A place of my own’**
 - Depictions of home beyond bricks and mortar
 - Tied to ideas of belonging
 - Tied to issues of safety
 - Visibility and invisibility
 - One person has many experiences of what it means to be homeless in Ireland today

Tentative Findings: Policy

- **Policy:**

- Reporting of homeless figures
 - Who counts? Who gets counted?
- Guidelines for communicating homeless issues
- Link to European level policy – how do we compare?

- **Media Policy?**

- Recognise the important impact of how homeless issues and experiences are communicated (e.g. online and TV)
- Consider the type of homeless experience prioritised as part of awareness and donation campaigns
- Do we need an alternative mediation? One that reflects the complexity of what it means to be homeless in Ireland today?

Next Steps

- Complete fieldwork
 - Homeless community and interview transcription
- Consolidate analysis of the various data collected
- Policy report drawing together key findings to a series of recommendations
- Continued feedback and dissemination
- Policy Recommendation Report launch: late 2018
 - Anyone interested in attending or receiving a copy of the results can contact me at: Kathy.reilly@nuigalway.ie