

Kathryn Kliff
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PWR 2: Cross-Cultural Rhetoric
Research Proposal

A Home is a Right:
The Swedish National Government's Response to the Homeless Problem

Unlike in the United States, the eradication of homelessness remains a priority for the Swedish national government. They believe that their citizens have a right to a home, and have worked hard to protect that right. Following a 1999 survey regarding homelessness, the Swedish Parliament appointed a special committee with a mandate to deal with the homelessness problem. The committee, endowed with the necessary funding, told each of Sweden's municipalities that they were required to formulate plans to deal with the issue in their own community. Even if the committee ends up being unable to end or even reduce homelessness, the act of creating legislation that deals with the issue puts them ahead of the U.S. It demonstrates the Swedish government's commitment to attempting to solve the problem. The question to be asked remains: does Sweden's approach to the homeless problem provide a model for the U.S.? If so, how can the U.S. attempt to emulate such an approach?

Based on my initial research, I have concluded that the Swedish government should serve as a model for the U.S. Sweden should be applauded for the mature approach it has taken by publicizing the problem, rather than ignoring its existence (which has been the trend in the U.S.). Although it seems extremely unlikely that Americans will be willing to bear the burden of increased taxes to fund programs similar to those implemented in Sweden, understanding the ways in which the Swedish government is taking action can be both informative and motivational; we can learn from their successes and failures and hopefully emulate their willingness to confront the issue.

My interest in the issue of homelessness arose rather recently. This past summer, I participated in the Sophomore College course, "Homelessness in America." While participating in the class, I learned about the issue from an academic point of view but I also had the opportunity to get to know the unhoused members of Palo Alto on a personal basis. From that experience, I learned that there are possible policy solutions to the problem but the federal government must make it a priority in order for it to be solved. Sophomore College inspired me to find other opportunities to learn about the issue. I took a course, entitled "Homelessness: Its Causes, Consequences, and Policy Solutions" fall quarter of this year in which I developed a research proposal for assessing the legal needs of Palo Alto's unhoused members. Both courses helped me to develop a firm understanding of the issue in my community, as well as the steps that have been taken to address it. They inspired me to work toward helping make it a priority in my own life and in my community.

As informative as my experiences have been, they have confined my knowledge of the issue to the United States. My hope for my proposed research is that it will allow me to discover how other countries (specifically, Sweden) attempt to deal with the problem. In order to do so, I will first need to conduct some basic historical research in order to be aware of the policies that have been adopted recently. Such research will include looking at the legislation itself as well as analysis of the legislation from various perspectives. These analyses will be taken from articles in sociology and other academic journals. Next, I will focus specifically on finding analysis of Swedish policies by American analysts to see if they believe that Sweden provides a possible model for the U.S. The latter analyses will probably be the most useful for my argument since the analysts may bring up issues I have not yet considered.

The next step in my research will be analyzing the rhetoric used by the Swedish when referring to the homeless population. I will compare their rhetoric to the rhetorical strategies employed by the U.S. and see how and if they differ. I will also analyze the ways in which both the U.S. and Sweden define homelessness in order to determine if the rhetoric signifies the attitude of each government toward the issue. The last step in my research will be learning about the different perspectives on the issue from interviews. In order to gain a better understanding of the attitude of the public in Sweden on the issue, I hope to conduct an interview with Andrea Lunsford, a professor at Stanford who recently traveled to Sweden. I will also interview another member of the Stanford faculty or a community member who deals specifically with American homelessness. These interviews should help give me some insight into the differing mentalities of citizens in both countries.

In terms of a timeline for my research, I plan on conducting preliminary research during the week of January 23 to 29. After meeting with my professor and gaining feedback from my peers, I will spend the rest of that week refining the direction of my research and raising key issues that will need to be addressed. The week of January 30 to February 5 will be spent collecting my research materials and deciding which sources I want to use for my paper. Over the course of the third week (February 6 to February 12), I will conduct interviews and refine my position based on the research I have already done. Once I have gathered all of my sources, I will start a rough draft of the paper. I hope to be able to gain feedback from my peers and my professor that will help me in making a coherent argument. From February 13 to February 19, I will continue to work on the draft, and I will complete a final draft by February 22nd. The following week will be spent developing and practicing my presentation, as well as making any last minute changes to my paper.

Research functions as a precursor to policy changes by demonstrating the possible effects of any given policy. Because homelessness remains a pressing problem across the globe, my hope is that my research will show that there are possible solutions to the problem and the U.S. needs to conduct the necessary research to find out which solutions will be the most effective. Sweden is just one model to consider, and my paper should spark future research of a similar kind. The U.S. has the power to solve the problem of homelessness, and it should use the models of other countries to make judgments about which policies will be most effective in eradicating homelessness. My paper should serve as a stepping stone in a long line of papers and policies that will step up to the challenge of giving all Americans a home.

Biography:

Kathryn Kliff is a sophomore at Stanford University. She graduated from Tesoro High School in Orange County, California. She came to Stanford with the intention of being an English major because of her love for creative writing. However, her plans changed once she reached her sophomore year. She now plans on majoring in Human Biology, with a concentration in Homelessness and Poverty. She still harbors her love for writing and plans on completing a minor in Creative Writing. Kathryn hopes to spend the summer working at the Opportunity Center (a homeless center in Palo Alto) as a children's coordinator. She volunteers once a week to help with the children's program at Haven House in Menlo Park. After completing her undergraduate education at Stanford, Kathryn plans on attending graduate school and possibly law school.