

Marjorie Lelubre (2017)

Le prix de l'insertion: accompagner vers le logement comme solution au sans-abrisme [The Price of Integration, Social Guidance Towards Housing as a Solution for Homelessness]

Paris: L'Harmattan, pp.228, €24.50

In this qualitative research, care relationships are examined, both from the perspective of the homeless client and that of the care providers. For three years, a group of clients was followed and periodically interviewed. The research includes: a historical analysis of homeless care in the Walloon region, an analysis of social and housing measures with regard to homeless people and an effect analysis of measures aimed at social integration.

Belgium is a highly regionalized country and has three regions: Wallonia, Brussels and Flanders. Competences such as well-being and housing belong to the regions, which means that the homelessness policy per region can vary considerably in Belgium.

This research took place in the Walloon region. In the first chapter, we get an overview of the development of homeless care since the abolition of the law on vagrancy in 1994. The abolition of this law meant that vagrants were no longer locked up and municipalities and NGOs became responsible for their reception. A penalizing approach was replaced by a social approach.

Characteristic for Wallonia is that social networks were set up in 2003 (the Relais Sociaux): partnerships between the larger cities and the NGOs in the region. It was realized in Wallonia that local cooperation is essential to be able to conduct a proper policy against homelessness. Even today, the 'Relais Sociaux' are still important. For example, they are the carriers of new initiatives such as housing-first in the region. This does not mean, however, that the policy against homelessness in Wallonia is completely free of criticism. The excessive emphasis on emergency shelters means that more housing-led or preventive solutions are more difficult to get off the ground.

However, the core of the research deals with the guidance relationship between the homeless person and the care provider. The quality of this relationship is essential for good social work. Government measures can promote this quality, but also impede it. An example of the latter is the 'social integration contract'. Although a positive policy measure, it remains a contract between unequal parties and putting everything on paper does not belong to the world of the clients.

However, clients also need to invest in this relationship: assistance also requires efforts and investments from the client. That is what the researcher means by the title of her research: the price of integration. Counselling requires a mutual commitment from the care provider and client to achieve the guidance goals. Trust is essential, but also the availability of house visits, negotiation, appreciation, etc.

There are three reasons to read this book.

First, it provides a thorough insight into the development of homeless care in Wallonia. In particular, the Walloon Relais Sociaux model may also be relevant for readers from other countries. One of the critical success factors for implementing an effective policy against homelessness is the quality of local cooperation. Wallonia has a legitimate regulated model that has proved its worth.

A second reason to read this book is that the client's perspective is also explicitly addressed in the research on the assistance relationship. As a result, emergency workers are held up to a mirror, which can promote their awareness. The visualization of the client's perspective also makes the research relevant for practice.

Finally, the book may also be of interest to researchers who are looking for a methodology to study aid relationships, which are complex and aspects of which are difficult to measure.

Danny Lescauwaet

Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, Belgium