



Networked Cooperation and Effort in the Fight against *Homelessness*

SPAIN

1. Introduction:

Homelessness in Spain is a little known phenomenon, one of which the citizenry is not much aware. The stereotypes tend to confirm the image society has of the homeless person: someone aged 50 to 55, with problems of alcoholism, dirty and drifting in the streets of a large city. This image distances the problem from citizens who are not suffering from it, and puts all the responsibility squarely with the individuals affected by exclusion situations. So it is not strange to hear, when someone comes into contact with another individual in a *homeless* process, disparaging comments such as “he is a layabout, a drunkard, who should be put to work cleaning the streets.” This disparaging and reproaching attitude is no less frequently accompanied by patronising welfare reactions, represented by charity, which not only makes the person feel guilty, but also deprive him of all dignity.

This lack of social awareness is reflected in an alarming shortage of studies and researchers focusing on this reality.

The public authorities are no exception to this lethargy, and in spite of the fact that clear progress has been made in recent years in proposing specific measures to deal with and to prevent homelessness, a great deal remains to be done.

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in Appendix I *Diagnosis on the Social Exclusion Situation in Spain* (p.54) to the second National Plan for Social Inclusion, and with reference to data provided by Caritas, there are some 30,000 people living in the street in Spain, while 250,000 lack housing and are accommodated in shanty dwellings, substandard housing or prefabricated dwellings.

The network geared to these people is predominantly urban: 72% of the centres for the homeless are in towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants, and only 9% are found in areas with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. To reach this population, there are hostels throughout the national territory, with 9,000 beds, some 20,000 seats in refectories, free baths and health centres. **There is also a chiefly private**

network as regards both the ownership (only 21% of the centres are public) and the management (14% are under public management).

2. Organisation of the public authorities

Four administrative levels can be differentiated in Spain by territoriality:

State Administration, the management powers of which are held by its instruments of government.

The instruments of government of this social, democratic State under the rule of law are:

- The Government
- The Parliament
- The Legislative Power
- The Judicial Power

The Delegated Administration is the extended competency of the Central or State Administration in the provinces and is integrated by the Provincial Delegations of the Ministries.

The Autonomous Administration, recognised by the Constitution of 1978, consists of 17 Autonomous Communities vested with full political autonomy and self-governing capacity powers.

Autonomy is the legal-political condition of those entities and organisations which, within the constitutional structure of a state, are vested with powers to enact their own laws. Article II of the Constitution defines the structure of the Spanish State as follows: "The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible fatherland of all Spaniards, and recognises and guarantees the right to autonomy of its constituent nationalities and regions and the solidarity between all of them."

Autonomy makes it possible to exercise certain powers of full legislative freedom within the boundaries established by a - generally constitutional - law of the state in which the autonomous entity acts.

The Local Administration is formed by basic local entities of the territorial organisation of the State, situated in the provinces (provincial councils, provincial communities) and municipalities (local entities, municipalities, forced municipal associations, voluntary communities, metropolitan entities and regional councils).

Article 148 of the Spanish Constitution defines the areas in which Autonomous Administrations can assume competencies. Social welfare is one of these. Conversely, the State Administration has exclusive competence in matters of labour legislation, basic legislation and the economic system of Social Security.

The transfer of competencies from the State Administration to the Autonomous Administrations is a relatively recent process, regulated by the Organic Law 9/1992 of December 1992, and inconclusive. In political terms, it is matter in which many interests converge, and so very difficult.

If we combine this complexity and the limited consolidation of the organisation model of public authorities, with a limited tradition of inter-institutional coordination, a feeble network of social services and, as we pointed out in the introduction, a not very developed sensitivity to the problem of *homelessness*, we can understand the current deficits when this problem is broached by the public authorities.

As we are aware, there is no entity, forum or department in the State Administration, the core concern of which focuses on homeless people. With regard to *homelessness*, we always encounter the more general scope of the General Secretariat of Social Affairs of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The lobbying work carried out at present by social entities working with homeless people before this Administration is centred on the explicit inclusion of the homeless as an excluded group and the adoption of specific measures.

The Second National Action Plan for Social Inclusion lists the homeless under the category of "most vulnerable persons" and lays down specific policy measures (Chapter 4, Objective 3.9 "promote efforts of attention to the homeless").

The situation in autonomous and local administrations varies widely. As a general rule, we can say that there are no formal fora of interdepartmental coordination and cooperation whose core objective is to plan and implement measures for the homeless. We do have some greater experience with interdepartmental coordination and cooperation in the more global scope of action for social inclusion.

3. Certain examples by areas of action

3.1 Access to accommodation

FEANTSA Spain

The Spanish members of FEANTSA include two entities, *Provivienda* and *Prohabitatge*, which were founded up to defend the right to housing.

The type of cooperation and coordination between these entities and entities focused on the homeless is informal, and is made official through cooperation agreements depending on projects carried out.

For entities focused on the homeless, it is very important to be able to work in coordination with entities specialised in the normalized real estate market. In numerous cases, they constitute the only possibility for people attended to by our services to gain access to housing.

Social Integration Housing Programme of the Government of Navarra

Sponsoring Entity

Government of Navarra - Navarra Social Welfare Institute - Department of the Environment, Regional Planning and Housing

Reference

Autonomous Decree 374/1997, of 15 December, on the regulation of Social Integration Housing

Autonomous Decree 287/1998 of 28 September, on the regulation of measures for support and financing of housing in Navarra

www.cfnavarra.es

ww2.cfnavarra.es/home_es/Actualidad/Informes/Medio+Ambiente (REPORT 2003)

Plan to Fight against Social Exclusion in Navarra (1998-2005)

www.cfnavarra.es/INSB/

Type of cooperation

Formal between departments of the Autonomous and Local Administration and the Associations.

This programme creates a formal forum of coordination and cooperation that enables both the public authorities and the social welfare entities to attain their objectives of access to housing for persons in an exclusion situation - it is not a programme geared specifically to the homeless.

It is worth stressing the consideration of housing as a merit good that must be regulated to guarantee access to all citizens. This goes beyond the conception of housing as a material good regulated by market forces.

3.2 Access to Healthcare

Mobile Psychiatric Team

Sponsoring Entity

Ministry of Social Services and Ministry of Health of the Community of Madrid

Type of coordination

Formal. A coordinating committee created, composed of representatives of the Autonomous and Local Administrations, as well as social welfare entities.

Purpose of the programme

Attend to homeless people in the street suffering from mental disorders. Facilitate access to supervised care centres.

Attainments

Adaptation of the healthcare system to the characteristics of the homeless. Coordinated work between the public authorities and the social welfare sector.

3.3 Access to employment

Regulation of integration companies

There are various territorial regulations, but we lack nationwide regulation. This lack of coordination between the State Administration and the Autonomous

Administration creates serious difficulties for social welfare entities that wish to promote the creation of integration companies.

Certain Autonomous Communities have cooperated to regulate integration companies among the ministries of social services and employment. This is the case of the Community of Madrid, in which was incorporated the social initiative as well.

3.4 Cooperation in the immigration sector

FEANTSA Spain

As in the case of access to accommodation, the members of FEANTSA Spain have a entity (Red Acoge) geared essentially to working with immigrants.

The influx of refugees and asylum seekers in Spain is significantly smaller than that of what we must call economic migrants.

The lack of coordination between the public authorities and the implementation of policy measures geared to more repression than integration, has given rise, in alarming proportions, in recent years, to the number of persons in an irregular situation who are taken care of services for the homeless.

4. Conclusions

Whereas important advances on how to approach the problem of the homeless have unquestionably been made in recent years, we are still very far from having policy plans that take account of the enormous complexity of the problem and consequently plan for a of inter-sectorial coordination and cooperation. Specific plans of action to intervene and prevent *homelessness* are rare, and consequently, experiences of inter-sectorial cooperation are limited and punctual.

Today, we can say that:

- Housing is progressing in economic terms. In recent years, we have witnessed a sustained rise of 15% annually in the price of housing, without any efficacious corrective measures being implemented.
- The public social expenditure has decreased by more than 4% since 1993.

- The problem of *homelessness* is seen as marginal and in many cases is broached more from the perspective of citizens' safety than of social welfare.
- The tertiary sector, and in particular that dedicated to working on social exclusion, is very fragmented and not very coordinated.
- Spanish society is in general terms not very aware of the problem of the homeless.

Finally, we deem it necessary to recreate the social intervention network of the homeless, bolstering internal coordination fora, and involving all actors: the various authorities and their departments, the civil society, companies, etc... Because only from this integrating perspective will we be able to broach the problem more efficiently.

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