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**Intervention Strategies: Homelessness and the
changing role of the State in Italy**

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**INTERVENTION STRATEGIES: HOMELESSNESS
AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE STATE IN
ITALY**

Thematic paper for Working Group 1

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Introduction

The notion of homelessness in the debate on the subject appears as an intrinsically dual notion: reference is made on one side to a housing dimension, the lack of accommodation, and on the other side to a 'social' dimension, the absence of social relations or ties which in turn would reveal situations of social exclusion or marginalisation. We may assume that the polarisation of the two meanings is constitutive of the problem homelessness (Tosi, 1999).

Current definitions and images address this duality by combining the two dimensions in different ways, usually privileging one over the other. Social constructions of the problem of homelessness are developed on this basis, which reflect collective attitudes, the organisation of policies and types of welfare regime. The constructions are country specific and reflect these different ingredients, as well as and more than differences in the reality of homelessness in different countries (Eurostat, 2004; Tosi and Torri 2005).

In Italy the social construction of the homeless is centred on the 'no abode'. Homelessness is essentially conceptualised as a problem of social marginalisation, most often the term denotes those homeless characterised by multiple deprivation and by traits of desocialisation/social disinsertion. In these portrayals, the strictly housing component - not having housing - is not central. It is implied in the definition, but is only considered important as part of the multiple dimensions of the problems of the no abode. Persons without a home, but not characterised by these traits tend to be classified differently. A sort of distinction is made between the two conceptual areas connected with the notion of homelessness. This separation reflects and confirms an accentuated (traditional) division between housing policies and welfare policies.

In other countries, the construction rests more on a housing dimension. This is the case for most of the countries represented in this Working group. This raises comparative questions for the papers on the different countries concerned. On one side, a comparability question arises as the paper are speaking of things that are partly different not just as they reflect different situations but because the notions of the policy frameworks (and of the authors) are different. On the other side, as both the reference to 'social' and the reference to 'housing' are construction choices and dualism is inherent in the notion, the question arises of what the theoretical and policy implications of different choices are.

1. The Changing Role of the State: The Impact on Homelessness Policies

Institutional and policy change

Social welfare as a whole has seen considerable innovation in this decade both on an institutional level and on that of policies. This resulted in a substantial evolution with respect to the traditional 'corporatist-conservative' regime (Esping-Andersen 1990)

Crowning a process that had lasted 50 years, the new welfare law (Law No. 328, 2000, "measures for the creation of an integrated system of social welfare action and social services") at the end of the 1990's made substantial changes to the social welfare policies: it provided for more active policies in the fight against poverty and for a development towards more universalistic mechanisms and a social rights oriented approach, and it also contained measures to make the welfare protection system more uniform over different geographical areas.

Extreme poverty

A basis for the inclusion of extreme poverties in the protection system was provided by this law together with some measures introduced in that period (most important, the experimental introduction of a minimum income system). An effort was made to overcome the traditional categorisation approach (Sacchi, 2005; Saraceno, 2004; Commissione, 2002), by extending protection beyond 'workers' and categories that are disadvantaged because of disabilities (Ranci, 2004). Furthermore the introduction of a broad and varied range/network of services and social services alongside traditional financial measures represented a possibility of great importance for action in the area of poverty. Potentially these changes had important consequences for policies on homelessness at national (and regional) level. They opened up the way, in principle, to improved policies along the lines indicated by various NGOs and municipalities which had been experimented at local level for some time.

The shift to the local

The localisation of social policies with the shift towards local/municipal welfare has constituted a fundamental change in policy organisation which has had important repercussions for intervention for the homeless.

The change, which has been supported by legislative and institutional changes (transfer of welfare responsibilities and functions to regions and municipalities, facilitated also by Law No. 328), certainly points to fertile ground for

increasing the effectiveness of policies. 'In the name of the need for diversified and integrated treatment of social problems, the local orientation tends to become an important point of reference in the definition of policy targets, alongside the traditional categorisation approach making reference to population group or type of need' (Bifulco, 2005, 32).

Nevertheless there are (very) problematic aspects with this development in the Italian system. The local character of social welfare intervention is a traditional trait of the Italian welfare state. In a system where recognition of social rights at national level mainly regards the sphere of monetary transfers and where a categorisation logic is adopted (workers, the elderly, the disabled), social assistance welfare has developed as a residual area, left to chance/handed over to the local municipality, to the priorities of local administrations. The 'wild municipalism' (Saraceno, 2004) which was fuelled in this manner has made the local an ambiguous terrain, difficult to govern.

The lack of a general legislative framework (legislation establishing minimum standards of support across the country) has contributed to the creation of this situation. What has resulted is a 'patchwork system' of policies (Sacchi, 2005), a geographical unevenness which translates into substantial inequalities between geographical areas, between municipalities even more than between regions, with regard to the provision and management of welfare services, to the point where different models of social citizenship are formed.

Law No. 328 sought to overcome this situation by establishing minimum standards of service provision throughout the country. The operation is in itself difficult: as has been said, reconciling local responsibilities with the pursuit of national standards is like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole (Caltabiano, 2004). However these aspects of the reform contained in Law No. 328 have remained unimplemented: the definition of minimum standards has not yet been performed even today. Furthermore there was a constitutional reform in 2001 (reform of Title V of the Constitution) which completes the transfer of powers for welfare to the Regions and gives Regions exclusive responsibility for welfare policies (Sacchi, 2005). This reform risks giving more space to geographical differences. This space has been increased by welfare localisation processes which in the meantime have moved forward; these further "increase exposure to the risk of segmentation and inequalities on a geographical basis, which also contributes to the erosion of the universalistic foundations of statutory authority" (Bifulco, 2005, 33).

An incomplete reform

Certain essential aspects of Law No. 328 were not implemented such as the definition of minimum standards and the establishment of a minimum insertion income and the objectives contained in it are now difficult to achieve, because of the cultural inertia and the vested interests of the services system, the delays and uncertainty in defining institutional and organisational structures, the

resistance on the part of the new centre-right government to following this path.

Subsequent behaviour of the government goes against important principles of Law No. 328. While a number of regions introduced social policies which implemented the principles of Law 328, at national level there are signs that this approach might be abandoned. This is a consequence of both the financial difficulties and cultural orientations of the new government. Central government actions and discourses confirm the relative distance from the welfare project at the base of the welfare Law, a different philosophy, in favour of a more markedly neo-liberal view on how to go 'beyond the welfare state'.

The situation today is characterised by the persistence of many traditional traits. Policies to fight poverty have maintained many of their traditional limitations, or to be more accurate they have worsened. Even today, policies to fight poverty only exist in indirect and 'implicit' form and are based on financial measures (family cheques, etc.); there are no measures like the minimum insertion income. As in the past:

"The fight against poverty constitutes quite a residual objective of the welfare Italian system: poverty, that is, is only attacked by indirect public sector intervention as a result of secondary policies which explicitly pursue other aims considered to require greater priority. What results is the emergency character, when not actually repressive, of the measures taken to address poverty" (2004, 127). "There is no true and genuine policy against exclusion and poverty in Italy, if what is meant by a policy is an integrated system of instruments explicitly aimed at this objective". There is neither a national minimum income programme nor an overall policy against social exclusion. This does not mean that there is no intervention in this area: "in various sectors of the national system of social protection.... there exist a number of devices which, taken together, form an implicit policy against social exclusion and poverty" (Negri and Saraceno, 1996).

Housing policies

Notwithstanding the difficulties of implementation, the Law 328 still provides the institutional framework for welfare policies and it represents the most significant symbolic reference for most actors in the field of social policies and services. Its practical consequences to-day may be seen mainly in the regional/local policies.

The situation is quite different as regards housing policies. In these twenty years progress with housing policies has not been comparable with that of other social welfare policies. In the case of Italy the housing area contains a number of elements which justify recourse to 'retrenchment of the state' rhetoric. Housing policies have experienced a reduction in direct public sector involvement and little innovation, just at a time when housing risk has become more widespread (and the policies are a contributory cause).

This backward development has important consequences for policies with regard to the homeless: above all it makes it difficult to overcome the traditional separation of social welfare policies from (social) housing policies.

Third sector

On last element to consider for a picture of policies is the role of the private social welfare sector in Italian welfare. One traditional factor is the presence of broad sectors of social policies left largely to private sector regulation which gave rise to a dualism in the overall system of welfare. The public and private sector systems tend to operate in parallel developing a strong interfunctional dependence, but at the same time maintaining full reciprocal autonomy. Generally speaking, this interdependence does not support a capacity to regulate the system as a whole (Ranci, 2004). Furthermore, in these conditions the model of relations between public and private sector that is currently developing - the subsidiarity model as interpreted locally - contains a risk of perpetuating the traditional particularism and making it difficult to include the third sector in public policies and maintain a universalistic perspective for welfare (Ranci, 1999).

2. Homelessness Trends and Representations

Trends

Despite the uncertainty over numbers, there is evidence of an increase over the last ten years of both homeless as of other socially marginalised groups. The increase has been accompanied by a change in the composition of the homeless that is similar to those occurring in other European Union countries: a fall in the average age, the appearance of female homelessness (nevertheless the social protection afforded to women in the fabric of society means that women are rarely explicitly homeless) and, more recently, an increase in homeless immigrants (Tosi, 2004b).

Estimates proposed for the no abode are between 17.000 and 60-70.000 people.

In 2000, a survey by the Zancan Foundation for the Commission on social exclusion (Fondazione Zancan, 2000) estimated that there were 17,000 no abode Italy. Previous estimates based on research studies and the opinions of social workers gave a higher figure (50-60,000 according to the 1990 survey). (This - at least partly - is due to the 'strict definition' adopted and the methodology employed based on the s-night method which is almost by definition an underestimate of the phenomenon). Afterwards, higher estimates, of between 50,000 and 80,000 have continued to be reported by field workers and the press. The estimates given by associations for individual cities more or less confirm these dimensions.

If then we were to extend the concept of homelessness further, for example by adopting the FEANTSA criteria either by considering situations of 'housing exclusion', then obviously the estimates would be decidedly higher. In 1994 - while the no abode were estimated at about

50,000-60,000 persons - those corresponding to the definition of homeless proposed by FEANTSA, could be estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000 persons (Tosi and Ranci, 1995).

The involvement of immigrants in homelessness is one of the two most important recent developments. Reports in the sense of an increase come from various cities and are made by those working in services. The size of the foreign component is still a significant factor with regard to trends in the last two-three years. The different composition by gender (and by age) is itself partly a consequence of the proportion of immigrant populations amongst the homeless (Tosi, 2004a).

The second development concerns the consequences that the growing economic vulnerability and the extension of the risk of poverty, including extreme poverty, to new groups previously untouched by this type of risk has had on the characterisation of the homeless.

Research evidence and data from services furnish indications of an increase in the material, economic component of poverty risk. It is a new form of economic poverty and hits households integrated in society and considered 'normal'. The most frequently cited factors of this new poverty include a lack of social security, the precariousness that results from rendering the labour market flexible and an increase in the cost of living and in rents. The homeless populations have also been involved in these new processes (Tosi, 2004a).

Constructing homelessness: the no abode

The differing estimates of the numbers of homeless are to a large extent the result of the conceptual uncertainty that surrounds the definition of homelessness and this focuses attention on the contrasting definitions that fight for prominence in the construction of the problem.

Conceptual uncertainty is revealed by the terminology adopted (*senza dimora*: no abode; *senza tetto*: without roof; *senza alloggio*: without accommodation etc.) and the fields considered are of differing breadths. The field covered is usually that of the rooflessness, but does not always extend to situations other than identified by the term *senza dimora*. The no abode is a specific type of social profile (they must have particular traits of social marginalisation) rather than a housing condition. Persons without a home, but not characterised by these traits tend to be classified differently, and different terms are used.

However the conceptual uncertainty surrounding the definition of homelessness also affects the narrow definitions. Even in this case the types of figure that are included can vary. For example, foreigners living in shacks, abandoned buildings and ruins may be left out of account as most do not fit the typical, conventional description of the no abode. In the same way gypsies are generally not considered as being of no abode, even when they are living in shacks or tents.

The consequences of this construction in terms of policies and intervention are obvious, the material and structural factors of the question risk to be neglected, the housing component is undervalued and above all the non extreme, non 'pathological' and non chronic components of homelessness are not given the attention they deserve – the temporary forms of homelessness.

There is a risk with this concentration on extreme situations of conveying the idea that the field of homelessness can be 'cut out' and separated from the broader processes that produce social and housing exclusion. There is also a related risk that the broader range of different types of housing exclusion are excluded from the debate on homelessness and that housing exclusion is neglected when it is not accompanied by strong traits of social marginalisation. Generally speaking there is scarce recognition of sectoral needs and poverty situations, and of situations which require 'weak' intervention or material support, at the expense of strong/multidimensional intervention or intervention with a strong dosage of social work support.

Changing perceptions

The figure of the no abode which has been at the centre of the debate and policies over the years, is still dominant today. Nevertheless this view has started to lose its credibility in recent years and signs of a possible change and broadening of perceptions and definitions are starting to be seen.

One first move in this direction came from the increase in the numbers of homeless immigrants and of immigrants among the homeless, and of immigrants using services for the no abode. Homeless immigrants provide a clear example of a type of homeless that contradicts the prevailing construction of the phenomenon centred on the figure of the no abode.

In most cases homelessness among immigrants, often of the 'street' variety, results from difficulties arising from being without documents, from difficulty in gaining access to housing markets and from insecure employment. There is a high probability of immigrants suffering housing exclusion without serious elements of marginalisation occurring and an even higher probability of them suffering housing exclusion without those features of personality de-structuring that characterises many no abode. They are simply poor people without a home. For them the lack of housing may be nothing more than a stage on the road to integration in a new society (Tosi , 2001).

After this, the already cited perception of an increase in the processes of impoverishment connected with an increase in the material, economic component of poverty risk contributed to the change in the images: a fact that focuses attention on the involvement of 'normal' groups in the population in processes of extreme poverty and on paths to impoverishment which pass through 'normality'. At a certain point it was realised that these new processes also regard homeless populations. One important consequence was the fading of the 'rhetoric of the absence of ties' as an identifying trait of a person on the streets.

“There is an increase in those with a ‘normal past’ behind them. In past decades we knew a person of no abode ... who presented a biography marked very strongly by marginalisation and exclusion (absent families, institutionalisation, prison, mental hospital, etc). This figure, which is certainly still present, is no longer prevalent. We observe people on the street marked by profoundly different biographies, who do not have a past history of marginalisation and exclusion, but of a normal life” (Bergamaschi, 2004b).

These new factors are going perhaps to modify the dominant images, and the bases for the social construction of homelessness in the country. In fact they challenge the traditional identification with the ‘no abode’ – but the untenability of this construction was clear even before and the shortcomings of this identification had been remarked time and again even before - and could help a more comprehensive view of the problem.

3. How is Homelessness Dealt with: The National Level

Policies that explicitly address homeless populations, other than mainstream housing policies or general policies to fight poverty (policies from which the homeless cannot only benefit but which constitute large part of the measures from which the homeless benefit) are centred on/limited to the no abode, intended as a type of extreme poverty.

Given this situation, which reflects the predominant construction in the country, the part that follows considers these policies only, at the expense of housing policies which are basically separate from those for the no abode (even if with some differences at local level, where attempts to combine the two are on the increase).

Even if the no abode or the seriously marginalised are still today given only marginal space in social policies, in the last few years some attention to the problem has manifested in some legislation, which indicates that this population has risen to occupy more room on the country’s political agenda.

In January 2000, after homeless people died of cold, the government issued a decree “to deal with the state of emergency resulting from the serious conditions regarding persons in a state of extreme poverty and who have no abode”.

A fund of 30 billion Lire was established to provide (in the 14 metropolitan areas) “rescue, accommodation and assistance by local administration departments, voluntary associations and other non profit organisations operating in the field” and “emergency accommodation services, the provision of emergency assistance and health care, social work and social reintegration services” for the beneficiaries of the initiative.

Despite its emergency origin (in fact many municipalities channelled these funds into emergency provision only), this first legislative act allowed some local administrations to strengthen their network of services and others to start their first intervention in this area. More generally it helped strengthen links

between the public sector, voluntary associations and the third sector for the purpose of providing integrated action to assist the no abode (Bergamaschi, 2004b, 44; Fondazione Bignaschi, 2000).

The general law on welfare cited (Law No. 328), approved in the same year, not only provided for urgent action for persons in extreme poverty, but also expanded services for 'persons in extreme poverty and persons of no fixed abode'. The law contains numerous references to extreme poverty and the no abode.

Intervention that constitutes an "essential level of social services" provided in the form of goods and services includes, at the head of the list, "measures to fight poverty and to support income and social support services with particular reference to persons of no fixed abode".

It is planned to increase the National Fund for Social Policies by 20 billion Lire each year (for 2001 and 2002) "in order to guarantee the expansion of intervention designed to ensure services for persons living in extreme poverty and for the no abode". The action provided for (to be implemented by municipalities and private welfare organisations) ranged from immediate shelter to health and welfare services, social work support and social reintegration.

Finally it is planned to extend the minimum insertion income as an anti-poverty measure and the no abode are among the beneficiaries afforded priority.

This orientation was then reaffirmed in the first implementation of the law which set out the guidelines (DCPM December 2000) and again in the National Plan for social policy and services 2001-2003. This plan contains a number of passages which regard intervention for the no abode. They include:

- "specific measures address the no abode both to favour integration and re-integration (...), to provide social support to recover personal and relationship skills and finally to address the needs of physical survival";
- the following must be provided for this specific population group: "the generalisation throughout the country of services and action designed to make contact with the no abode and to provide them with conditions for damage reduction and to offer them roads to recovery";
- the 'Zone plans' (local plans) must contain measures designed to: set up at least one low threshold access service for the various sub area levels (neighbourhoods/districts particularly frequented by the no abode); develop at least one transitional housing and social support service; promote initiatives for co-operation between social, health, occupational services, etc.

The *National action plan against poverty and social exclusion 2003-05* (the first drawn up by the new government) also included among its priorities the fight against 'extreme poverty' and intervention for 'the most vulnerable groups'. The latter also comprise 'persons of no fixed abode' or 'persons without an abode' (Ministero del lavoro, 2003b, 16).

The plan does not identify specific concrete objectives to be achieved. The principal objectives are: to reduce the number of persons in conditions of extreme poverty; to increase local services for persons in conditions of extreme poverty; to make those of no fixed abode 'socially visible'. The income of last resort is seen as an appropriate instrument to fight extreme forms of hardship and social exclusion.

The policy measures for 'support to vulnerable groups' are equally generic. They includes, amongst other things, "valuing the indications contained in Law No. 328, in the National plan

for intervention and social services 2001-2003 and in various regional measures which signal an obligation to provide accommodation for persons of no fixed abode in all areas”.

The FIOpsd (the umbrella organisation of services working with persons of no abode) comment on this NAP recognises that the document contains “appreciable new elements compared to the previous plan” and “important statements of principle”, but says that it has no strategic vision and is lacking in the necessary detail. It is “more a collation of heterogeneous materials than the fruit of a strategically based policy vision to fight social exclusion in Italy, in which serious marginalisation and the multidimensional nature of hardship are not given adequate consideration”. The FIOpsd cannot see in this document “adequate measures to fight the phenomenon of serious marginalisation and of persons of no abode, nor does it feel that the European objectives of uprooting poverty by 2010 can be achieved with an approach which is still vague on the issues” (31/7/2003).

The meaning of this development is complex.

“There has been persistent uncertainty in identifying the problem and the reference framework. To remain on the lexical plane, a basic uncertainty has been observed over how to term the problem: at times one talks of ‘persons of no abode’, elsewhere of ‘persons of no fixed abode’ or again of ‘extreme poverty’. Furthermore it cannot be deduced from a reading of (documents such as NAP 2003), whether the categories termed ‘persons of no (fixed) abode’ and those termed ‘extreme poverty’ are the same or whether the latter contain the former” (Bergamaschi, 2004a, 47).

The development is to be understood on the level of the ideologies that it expresses and of the meaning of the welfare model that is proposed. The inclusion of social exclusion in the welfare system is an important new factor. A new area of intervention is instituted in which policies and social services must intervene. Nevertheless, if we analyse the set of measures and documents cited, we find a “profound ambivalence”. On the one hand they “remove intervention for the ‘no abode’ from its marginal and residual position” which it had occupied until then. On the other hand this inclusion occurs by making the no abode a (new) category: “the conditions of life and need of these persons are reduced to a category defined on an administrative level, which reproduces that categorisation approach to need which has characterised our welfare system historically while the whole philosophy of Law No. 328 seems to try to overcome it” (Bergamaschi, 2004a, 46).

This aspect must be interpreted together with another: the possible tendency on the part of the legislator to concentrate efforts on the most needy population groups, ‘the poorest’: a tendency, as is known, which leads directly to the heart of the contradictions/antinomies that characterise the search for new welfare models. We will return to this point in the conclusion. On the one hand there is a desire to extend the benefits of social protection also to these populations, largely excluded until now. However, on the other hand, as Castel (1995) suggests: “the shift indicates that protection is being shifted on populations placed outside the ordinary regime”.

If we pass from the ideologies to the practices, the facts reveal little or no translation of these measures into effective policies. The practical consequences of these documents have been insignificant.

The failure to implement essential points of the measures contained in Law No. 328 hits the homeless in particular. The ‘minimum levels’ were not defined at national level (while the definition was performed by some regions). Broad cover of the entire country with networks of provision has not been provided. This is partly why large geographical disparities remain.

Furthermore there is no specific funding at national level (except through the Fund for social policies). With the completion of the transfer of competencies to Regions, the resources for local intervention for the no abode were incorporated into the general ‘undifferentiated’ fund for welfare, a choice which could help to increase differences between local policies.

The new government has not even given any room for those emergency funds from which the national interest in the ‘no abode’ on the part of the previous government began and which were then put forward again by Law No. 328.

And despite the recommendation in the 2003-2005 NAP to “value the indications contained in Law No. 328, in the National plan for intervention and social services 2001-2003 and in various regional measures which signal an obligation to provide accommodation for persons of no fixed abode in all areas”, none of this was implemented in terms of effective policies.

A new philosophy of welfare and problems with public spending seem to be conspiring to halt developments in national policies.

The FIOpsd comment on the 2004 Annual Finance Law found that it had wandered from the intentions expressed in the NAP and cast doubt over the “actual desire (of the government) to intervene structurally in the fight against social exclusion”. The range of intervention for the homeless continues to be characterised by the “insufficiency of the intervention” and the “discontinuous and emergency character” of action at local level: a picture which puts the responsibility of central government in question.

4. How is Homelessness Dealt with: The Local Level

Responsibility for the homeless in Italy is entrusted (mainly) to local government and to associations and private welfare organisations. Also from this viewpoint, intervention for the homeless reflects the historical limits of the welfare system and the issues that have accompanied its transformation over these years.

There are two main traits. The first is the role of the private social welfare sector in Italian welfare; the second is the geographical heterogeneity of policies that has been mentioned many times.

Heterogeneous local models

The geographical variability that characterises the entire welfare assistance system applies also for the no abode. It is shown by a research study conducted on behalf of the *Commission to investigate social exclusion* on policies and initiatives implemented by local authorities to assist persons of no abode (Fondazione Bignaschi 2000).

The picture that emerges from this analysis, which involved twenty cities in different regions, confirms the co-existence of very heterogeneous models of intervention at local level is a characteristic feature of policies for the homeless. There are very large differences that concern both public and voluntary/private welfare action. Local policy systems and action to assist the no abode present a high degree of heterogeneity that can not be explained by the differences in economic and social structure, nor by different regional welfare models. The picture that emerges shows the fragmentation of social policies and the extreme variation in local voluntary initiatives. The difference concern the degree to which needs are covered and the criteria for access to services and accommodation.

What predominates on the whole is a traditional welfare assistance type setup which gives priority to responding to primary needs by the immediate provision of survival goods and resources for the purpose of alleviating hardship, even temporarily. Alongside this tendency the study also found the existence of advanced programmes of intervention which integrate different types of resource and aim at the more complex objectives of social reintegration.

There is a large gap between the north and south of the country in this respect. In the towns and cities of northern and central Italy attempts to go beyond the traditional old fashioned welfare approach based on emergency measures are more frequent and are often up to the same standards as the best European practices.

In the more innovative areas the no abode now enjoy a full range of services: preventative services, emergency and crisis services and rehabilitation services. Different types of shelter and accommodation services are provided to meet the differing needs of a very heterogeneous user base. Multidimensional, integrated action (action that integrates different types of resource such as health, personal relations resources, financial, training and housing resources) is offered to help individuals to develop their own capacities for reintegration into society. Co-operation between local actors and integration of services (public, voluntary and private welfare) are standard practice. Municipal administrations play a more active role here in formulating policies and promoting forms of co-ordination with welfare co-operatives and voluntary organisations.

In southern Italy, however, local authorities are generally not well equipped with shelters and accommodation services and have not established stable working relations with the third sector. They prefer to delegate service provision, sometimes entirely, to the Church and to voluntary associations. They rarely play a role in programming policies or by inspecting existing initiatives. The services provided are also aimed mostly at satisfying primary needs (material support) and tend to be targeted at an undifferentiated user base (Commissione, 2002, 163).

Municipalities and voluntary organisations

The same heterogeneity that characterises the ‘incomplete network’ of intervention for the no abode developed at local level, is also encountered with regard to the presence, the size and the characteristics of the third sector in these contexts and to the different relations that it has as a policy actor with local public sector actors.

A recent comparative research study into national and local systems to fight poverty, which involved thirteen cities belonging to six European countries (Saraceno, 2004), confirmed the crucial role of the third sector in action to fight poverty. It also showed how the importance of the third sector to strategies to fight poverty depends not so much on its general presence but on the type of actors from this sector present in a given context and how they act: how they relate to the public sector, the areas in which they intervene and how, etc. The institutions and actors in the third sector differ in terms of the quantity and quality of human and financial capital they employ, in terms of their degree of institutionalisation and organisational complexity, the type of social and at times the political and institutional recognition that they enjoy.

What results is a very varied picture. In some cases third sector organisations have official relations of co-operation with public sector bodies (different forms of contracting out or official responsibilities); in other cases their action develops with greater autonomy, even if they depend on public funding; in yet other cases third sector action fills in where public sector intervention is lacking or, vice versa, it may overlap with it and compete with the public sector. The research also shows how the presence of the third sector in the social policies field can not be a substitute in the absence of a sufficiently well developed public sector. A weak presence of public sector action in the fight against poverty is matched by an equally insignificant role played by the third sector.

The concrete methods of operation of local welfare systems depend therefore to a large extent on the role and the reciprocal provision of a set of factors: the presence and characteristics of institutional networks of intervention, the participation of the third sector and also, however, on the degree of universalism and the accessibility of the measures. Different combinations of these factors tend to produce profoundly different local/municipal welfare systems with different consequences for the population of beneficiaries.

In Italy, but also elsewhere, the process of integration and the deep roots of the third sector in the public policy making sphere occurs in local contexts with very different traditions and characteristics from the viewpoint of the presence and rooting of these organisations. This can give rise, as this study demonstrates, to models of governance that may be extremely different from each other and to different interpretations of social citizenship rights.

Italy is a country in which the strongly independent tradition of its third sector is not only becoming stronger but is also changing through a marked process of institutionalisation. Public sector institutions are in fact tending to encourage the development of this sector and at the same time to incorporate its role in forms of public regulation. This occurs in different ways according to the local context: in Turin, for example, there is strong integration of third sector agencies into the public sector which, however, tends to maintain a strong role in defining the objectives and standards of action. In Milan there is a more

rooted system of delegating welfare responsibilities above all for certain categories of need, in a more or less explicit fashion, by the public sector.

Today initiatives in favour of the no abode by both voluntary associations and municipalities are strengthening. The importance of the action of Regions and municipalities reflects both the responsibilities resulting from the implementation of devolution and the requirement to fill in the gaps in national policies. The initiatives range from emergency shelters to reception centres and re-integration programmes. In many cases the initiatives are supported by regional laws or plans which provide measures and resources destined specifically for the homeless or persons in extreme poverty. One important element seen in various local policies is an attempt, which is particularly innovative in Italy, to (more effectively) connect intervention for the homeless with housing policies (e.g. allowing points for access to public sector housing: Fiops 2004b). These initiatives may, nevertheless, suffer from cuts to budgets, especially as a result of the cuts made in the transfers of funds from central government to regions and municipalities (Tosi, 2004a).

Even where substantial progress has taken place, the new innovative culture of intervention has not translated systematically into concrete initiatives and the new services it has produced are insufficient quantitatively. Emergency oriented policies are still the rule rather than the exception at local level, and there is an increase in the emergency supply on the part of municipalities and also of many NGO initiatives. There is also the lack of resources which also hits the emergency supply.

5. Prospects

1. The analysis brings into question the limits of the general welfare system as more important than the lack of a national strategy for the homeless: the poor effectiveness of policies to fight poverty, the weak preventative character of welfare policies (Fiopsd: “there is *de facto* no general policy to prevent hardship in Italy”), the heterogeneity of local systems and the unloading of the responsibility onto the private social welfare sector.

These traits risk becoming worse with the new path taken by the new government. The ‘new moral economy of welfare’ (see Tosi, 2003a) implies the idea to rely increasingly on private welfare to perform functions in the name of the principle of subsidiarity (According to Fiopsd responsibility for “guaranteeing rights and services for the no abode, as for others, is increasingly delegated to social welfare co-operatives and to support from charity”). Furthermore principles are being introduced which could make the approach to poverty regress to the situation prior to Law No. 328. According to Fiopsd, belief in a logic of welfare to work, “combined with political orientations designed to rationalise and reduce financial resources, is resulting in the idea that social exclusion of the no abode is irreversible, and the sector is likely to

be considered marginal because persons suffering hardship are apparently lacking in potential for the world of work. This is despite the idea contained in Law No. 328/2000 of approaching hardship with a proactive and process philosophy”.

A local character is in some ways inherent in the structure of policies for the homeless: they are to a large extent a hotch potch of heterogeneous, specific and mainstream, measures (Damon, 2002), and possibilities for ‘harmonisation’ depend on the local sphere. This occurs even where, as opposed to Italy, national policies and legislation do exist (see Zittoun et al, 2003). In actual fact the local character is the outcome of a process common to welfare policies over the years which has seen the local sphere as a route to integrate intervention and to overcome the limits to the effectiveness of classic welfare. However the local character in Italy is associated with more difficult questions because of the history of its welfare model and because of the recent process of progressive ‘localisation’ of social welfare (regionalisation and municipal welfare). The risks of geographical segmentation and inequalities have increased, even more so as these processes form part of the administrative rationalisation set in motion with the objective of containing public spending (Bifulco 2004).

On the basis of these considerations and as a first indication, the request to implement the comprehensive approach contained in Law No. 328 is reasonable.

The FIOpsd has repeatedly underlined the need for more systematic work, for a change to a network approach and for integrated treatment as provided for by Law No. 328: “the implementation of integrated intervention in social services, to be applied throughout the country and for local administrations to directly involve private sector welfare organisations to build an integrated strategy for serious marginalisation into every district plan” (13/5/2004).

Such a change requires a commitment from central government on which the possibility of extending best practices to the whole country also depends. To achieve this the FIOpsd had also requested the reiteration of funding for local projects under Law No. 328 of 2000.

The definition of essential/minimum levels and the institution of a minimum income measure are among the essential measures for this advance.

Both preventative policies and emergency treatment and reintegration policies also require the availability of context policies: housing, occupational integration, etc. The chances and effectiveness of specific policies also depend on them.

2. Other indications come from the recent changes in the composition and the profiles of the homeless. Both the increase in the immigrant component and the existence of a homelessness which ‘fishes’ people out of normal poverty involved modifications, even difficult to achieve, in the practices and organisation of services for the homeless. A demand to adapt which is still unmet both in services practices and in the policies.

These modifications also affect the attitudes that regulate the policies. While on the whole (with local exceptions) no processes of 'criminalisation' of the poor have been recorded, nor has there been a 'militarisation' of public space, what predominates is a mix of compassion and fear, and the relationship with the immigration problem complicates the picture concerning attitudes: the issue of the rejection of undocumented immigrants, which pervades the discourse on immigration, may have serious consequences for managing the homelessness issue.

In general the new service beneficiaries cannot be catalogued in established categories (Bergamaschi, 2003), and the difficulty in dealing with them reflects the difficulty in extending protection to marginal categories as much as the impossibility of identifying the homeless with those socially marginalised addressed by previous policies.

One of the problems that appeared was whether a 'by category' approach allows adequate protection for the homeless. The category character of policies and of provision is at the same time a guarantee for those categorised (who become holders of a social right) and it involves a selection at the expense of some categories, as criticised in the traditional categorisation character of Italian welfare. Furthermore enclosing answers within a scheme that classifies populations and needs involves simplifications and reductions with regard to the variety of needs as has been observed for the classifications typical of classic welfare models. The difficulty of the no abode in gaining access to services in Italy (Gui, 1995), and their exclusion from the welfare system and the distance between the services practices and the need of the homeless has been attributed to the categorisation nature of the system.

Even if Law No. 328 does not employ a categorisation approach, the measures for the no abode assume a classificatory perspective: their inclusion occurs by introducing a new category and this is "an administrative classification which standardises from the outside, it does not grasp the specificity of different situations" (Bergamaschi, 2004a).

3. The development of the representations, influenced in turn by changes in the profiles, is positive from this viewpoint: it allows more complex responses, more respectful of the heterogeneity of these populations.

However the construction of the problem of homelessness must be developed further, supporting the signs of improvement indicated, in the direction of a broader consideration of homelessness. The objective is to integrate the question of homeless into more general policies of the fight against poverty. This objective is still far off, as no acceptable link has yet been formed between the different components of the question, between the no abode and the other components of housing exclusion.

In contrast with the accent commonly placed on the heterogeneity of these populations, the persistent reference to the 'no abode' still overwhelms thinking and social work practices: as can be seen from the insistence on social work support as the most importance practice, even in comparison with welfare

policies, on the chronic nature of the phenomenon as ‘one of the traits usually associated with the no abode’, the ‘rhetoric of the absence of ties’ as an identifying trait of a person on the streets (see the debate in *Il profilo*, 2004), and therefore the request for ‘integrated’ individual intervention as the rule with no recognition of the value of ‘sectoral’ approaches centred on the provision of material resources to solve the problems of poverty etc. (Tosi, 2005a).

4. These assessments need to be located within the broader debate on the new welfare. The growing interest in the no abode has complex relations with welfare transformations. The (partial) inclusion of the homeless in the protection system (in Italy and also in other countries) was proposed in a picture in which welfare was changing and the models were beginning to fluctuate between selective universalism and the risk of policy dualism.

The no abode in Italy have caught a glimpse of welfare just when it is being put into question and cut back. While Law No. 328 was introducing the principles of universalistic welfare into the legislation, its implementation is occurring/should take place precisely when in Italy too the hypothesis of privatising welfare, the principles of welfare to work and moves to limit social welfare spending are gaining strength.

Like all policies centred on extreme cases, the growing interest in the ‘no abode’ may in effect mean the abandonment, together with an increase in effectiveness and appropriateness, of the universalism of welfare tradition and the start of dualism in policies.

The new measures targeted at particular categories and/or geographical areas is crucial to an understanding of the ‘new social’ policies (Damon, 2002). They are part of a “welfare of the third type” (“transverse” policies, situated “at the intersection of two institutional groupings that are not clearly separated: insurance and welfare assistance”) (Donzelot, 1991), for which it is difficult to predict the developments today. There is, however, consensus over what the critical factors are on which to focus attention for an assessment of the meaning of these policies: the contractual character of the action, the notion of ‘re-insertion’ (the “exclusion-insertion pair”), the idea of the assumption of responsibilities by recipients to tackle their condition of exclusion and dependency

5. The increase of urgency devices, of low threshold services, of special forms of accommodation (shelter, *hebergement*...), reported in various countries, raises a number of questions on the meaning of current policies and actions.

Questions above all on their continuity with the trend which has characterized the last two decades – the “shift from remedial and emergency approaches towards preventative approaches and more integrated forms of intervention”.

The emergency provision in Italy may at the same time mean moving away from that line of development and the continuation of a previous tradition, the persistence of which (despite progress in the culture of services) has been constantly complained of by workers in the sector.

Question marks remain to which it is difficult to give answers. They have been raised on all sides over the meaning of this type of provision today:

- on the relationship with the social policies situation, a question posed very directly by Thematic group 2 (2004): “are emergency services more and more reflecting the withdrawal of the state? Is there a greater responsibility for NGO’s to deliver basic shelter for the homeless (people sleeping rough), while this was previously more a task of the (local) state? Are people who now find a shelter in emergency services experiencing the consequences of a shift from welfare towards workfare? Are people now more oriented towards emergency shelters because of the changing policy regarding the use of public spaces, e.g. more repressive policy towards begging?”;

- on what type of insertion of the homeless the multiplication of urgency devices produces and according to which integration models (Clément et al, 2003).

In Italy the point has been set in relation to the recent growth in (attention to) low threshold provision: abandonment, control and containment, or the provision of easy opportunities to access a roof and the possibility to gain access to non-conventional resources, respect of the freedom of those who do not wish to reintegrate/care for themselves, respect for ‘the times of the individual’, etc.? (see the debate in Il profilo. 2004).

Obviously one answer to the question consists of recognising that these services must be located within a system of provision (Valentini, 1996), that the low threshold must be understood as one passage of the entire services model. The value of low threshold provision and its limits depend on the success of its integration in a system/network which includes a sufficiently broad range of types of service provision.

6. The question must also, however, be set in the context of the tensions that characterise the new culture of intervention shared by associations and services, looking at the intrinsic limitations and the need to review its rhetoric in the light of the relations it has with the dilemmas of the new policies.

Opposite to low threshold provision and in some ways mirroring it there is the provision of (individual) plans/paths for (re)integration designed to achieve independence. The tension between low threshold and insertion spans the entire culture of intervention. Integration and the achievement of independence, however, constitute the unifying objective, the horizon of this culture (Tosi, 2005a).

The culture common to those providing services for the homeless today is a mix of the substantial remains of traditional welfare assistance and of the new culture which has progressively characterised practices in Europe in recent years.

“a shift from large-scale institutional accommodation and services towards the small-scale and individualised assistance. It has been claimed that this has been associated with a shift from remedial, emergency and treatment-based approaches towards preventative approaches, which in turn has resulted in a move from segmented services to more integrated forms of intervention. Latterly, an increasing emphasis on reintegration programmes has become evident” (Edgar et al, 1999, 61).

Closely confined within the boundaries of the limited choice between intervention with emergency service supply and providing insertion paths based on ‘individual reintegration plans’, this culture participates in the ideologies of the new welfare: access to welfare benefits by contract, the assumption of responsibility by recipients for tackling their condition of exclusion and dependency and so on, sharing the risks of these ideologies.

The problematic consequences of placing reintegration objectives and the determination of assistance on a contractual basis at the centre of welfare culture have been stated repeatedly: the asymmetric character of the relations (dependence on the provision, the ‘exchange’ defined from the viewpoint of the institution, as in all these policies); the selectivity and the effects of creaming off the best, etc. (Damon, 2002).

The ambiguity of the incitement to independence has been likewise criticised (Tosi, 2005a). The meaning of these principles, however, varies according to the ideological schemes.

The assistance relationships and the imperative of activation to which they must respond can be understood in different ways. They can be of a fundamentally pedagogical nature. “The public function performed in this relationship is of an authoritarian, correctional and ‘punitive’ type’. On the other hand, reversing the direction of responsibility, it is considered that it is the provider and not the recipient that is responsible for the dependence that might be created and for overcoming it”. “In this case the position of the recipient in the relationship is that of the owner of the right to perform her/his ability to choose and to act to which there is a corresponding legitimate claim to have the conditions needed to perform it. The authority implied in the relationship is exercised not on the recipient but on those conditions, on the context that is, the actors and the resources that affect the chance of the persons to use and increase their capacities (to work, to live, to create social relations, etc.)” (Bifulco and De Leonardis, 2005, 214-15).

The two models assume two different interpretations of how the ‘dependency’ that taking responsibility and giving assistance to somebody tends to generate is defined and why it must be avoided. According to one first explanation this intervention tends to ‘uneducate’ the recipients, to cultivate the bad habits in them of ‘welfare handouts’, of opportunism, of claiming rights without contributing, of idleness, etc. “This is the case of explanations that justify measures designed to put recipients to the test and to reward merit; the most explicit version of this is contained in the *welfare to work* policies. According to a different explanation this intervention tends to incapacitate the recipients, depriving them of resources and capacities (...) thereby binding persons to the assistance provided. This is the case of explanations that call into play the ‘moral career’ of the recipients (Goffman) and the sink into a chronic condition as an institutional outcome and which lie behind measures and action designed to make persons affected by this chronic condition ‘valid’. The two positions clearly define dependency in opposite ways, as ‘free rider’ behaviour or as subjugation, and they attribute responsibility in equally opposing ways” (Bifulco and De Leonardis, 2005, 214).

This confirms, yet again, the need to work on the welfare system. However, this also confirms the validity of a principle, much preached but hardly practised at all, which would mark a clear break with classic welfare: the need to put the resources and the capacities of the homeless at the centre of the action (a type of assistance, which “is defined starting from the recognition of the resources and capacities that people have and they start from these because these resources are valued and exchanged by a person as skills to be used”: Il profilo, 2004, 6).

7. Finally it is important to reflect on the ambiguities that characterise relations between public and third sector actors in the field of intervention for the no abode. Today public sector institutions recognise third sector organisations increasingly more explicitly as appropriate partners for dealing with these types of problem (above all with regard to social support and integration in society). This is accompanied by a risk of overloading the third sector, of institutionalising it, which involves a progressively more functional and subordinate role for third sector organisations in public policies. To consider another aspect, the tendency to delegate responsibilities (above all in areas where the institutional network of social protection is poorly developed) continues to operate, and even, in some municipalities, intervention is left entirely to the spontaneous initiatives of the third sector organisations active locally. The consequences are particularly worrying in the case of intervention aimed at the no abode, a sector traditionally ‘without cover’ from the viewpoint of public sector initiative and left to depend on the capacities of private social welfare organisations to act.

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