
Building Capacity of Homeless Services in the Czech Republic

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› **Abstract** *After political changes in Central European countries in 1989, a growth in visible homelessness became evident. Using the example of the Czech Republic, the article describes the establishment and development of social services and the role of NGOs in providing services to the homeless. It also describes the revival of churches, their charities and diaconias, the establishment of civic associations and local initiatives and the creation of the initial services. Apart from local models inspired by foreign examples, transnational entities also brought their experiences. The article provides an overview of the evolution of homeless services and the difficulties and tensions between indigenous and external service providers in meeting the needs of the homeless.*

› **Keywords** *social services; NGOs; networking; Czech Republic.*

Introduction

Following the political changes in Central European countries, homelessness emerged as a visible social problem. Policy responses to this issue have, in many such countries, been slow to develop. The role of civil society and non-governmental agencies has thus been pivotal in ensuring the provision of services for the homeless during the last eighteen years. However, the emergence of the non-profit sector has itself been problematic and the development of the sector has been variable cross-nationally and subject to diverse influences (Salamon and Anheier, 1996). This article examines the emergence of the non-profit sector in the provision of homeless services in the Czech Republic and considers the factors that have been influential in shaping the structure of the sector and the development of the capacity of the sector to meet the needs of homeless people. The context of this discussion is the

understanding of the nature of an existing, growing and changing problem of homelessness since 1990 and the absence (until very recently) of any coherent national or regional strategy or political priority to deal with the issue.

It has been argued that the Czech non-profit sector is large relative to its counterparts elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Frič *et al.*, 1996). The article takes its frame of reference from the modified *Esping-Andersen* model adapted by Salamon and Anheier (1996) which identifies four distinct models of non-profit development or four types of 'non-profit regime', each characterised not only by a particular state role, but also by a particular position of the third sector. This model is described in detail in the following section. On this basis it is appropriate to use the Czech Republic¹ to illustrate the issues that are common to most 'statist' (Central European) countries in the development of third sector homeless services over this period, while recognising the need for further research to identify cross-national differences.

The article identifies the importance and the different influences of three distinct types of non-profit agency or NGO. First, there is the effect and influence (especially at Governmental level) of extra-national agencies, which has had both positive and negative effects. Second, there is the influence of (pre-existing) church-based 'confessional' agencies, which have had effects both at national and at regional level and which have tended to operate in a very specific domain of provision. Finally, there is the influence of the emergence of new civil society agencies, which have had to compete for funding and public support against extra-national agencies and in a context of a limited history of philanthropy.

The Development of the Non-profit Sector

The welfare regime models of Esping-Andersen (1990) are well documented and have been used in explanations of the diversity of service provision for the homeless (see Edgar *et al.*, 2002). While Esping-Andersen does not apply his analysis to the question of the appearance and growth of the non-profit sector, it does have some relevance to this question. Non-profit organisations are not only providers of services but are embedded in prevailing social and economic structures (Siebel, 1990). Hence, by modifying Esping-Andersen's analysis to incorporate the non-profit sector, Salamon and Anheier (1996) argue that it is possible to identify four distinct models of non-profit development and types of regime each characterised

¹ The Czech Republic was established 1.1.1993 following elections in 1992 which led to the creation of Slovakia as an independent state.

by a particular state role and also by a particular position for the third sector (p18). They differentiate these regimes in terms of two key dimensions: the extent of social welfare spending; and the scale of the non-profit sector (Table 1).

Table 1 – Model of Third sector Regime

Government Social Welfare Spending	Non-profit Sector Scale	
	Low	High
Low	Statist	Liberal
High	Social Democratic	Corporatist

Source: Salamon and Anheier (1996)

Hence, Salamon and Anheier (1996) argue that in the *liberal model*, low social welfare spending by Government is associated with a relatively large non-profit sector. In the *social democratic* model, state-sponsored and state-delivered social welfare protection is quite extensive, while the room left for service providing non-profit organisations is constrained. In the *corporatist* model, the State has either been forced or induced to make common cause with non-profit institutions, so that non-profit organisations function as one of several pre-modern mechanisms that are preserved by the State in its effort to pre-empt more radical demands for social welfare protection. In the *Statist* model, the State exercises power with a large degree of autonomy sustained by long traditions of deference and a more pliant religious order. In this situation, limited Government social welfare protection does not translate into high levels of non-profit action and both welfare protection and non-profit activity remains constrained. While this is a useful heuristic device to identify broad tendencies, significant variations can be expected to exist between countries that fall into any particular grouping. This approach is useful in distinguishing different pathways of third-sector development. Thus we may expect some relationship between the level of Government welfare expenditure and non-profit activity (for example liberal and social democratic countries), extensive co-operation between Government and the non-profit sector (in corporatist countries), and non-profit support being derived from commercial activities in the absence of private philanthropy or state involvement (in the statist countries). The Czech Republic is more typical of a 'statist' regime, but the influence of state funding to non-profit sector social services (including NGO homeless services) is relatively large compared to other statist regimes.

Empirical research utilising this theoretical understanding (Frič *et al.*, 1996), suggests that the size of the non-profit sector in Central European (CEE) countries (as measured by employment) is low compared with non-CEE countries, but that the non-profit sector in the Czech Republic is larger than that in other CEE countries. Furthermore, the sector tends to be dominated by cultural and recreational organisations while employment in social services is low (11% compared to an all-country average of 18%). Consistent with its composition and similar to other countries in the region, the Czech non-profit sector receives the bulk of its revenue from fees and charges rather than from private philanthropy or the state (Frič *et al.*, 1996; p294). However, public sector payments account for around 40% of Czech non-profit revenue, which is relatively high compared with Central Europe. In the social services, by contrast, half of all non-profit sector revenue is derived from the public sector, compared with 30% from fees and 20% from private philanthropy. Frič *et al.* (1996) suggest that this may be due in part to matching Government contributions which are required by European Union programmes and other international public grants.

The Context of the Homeless Problem in the Czech Republic

Before the seismic changes that took place in 1989, the duty to work was enacted directly in the constitution of Czechoslovakia². There was no evident unemployment. State-run companies were obliged to employ a planned number of workers, and companies ran workers' hostels. People incapable of joining the working process were often placed in psychiatric hospitals, while those who were capable of working but did not want to, were sentenced to prison for the crime of 'social parasitism'. After 1989 the workers' hostels disappeared, mostly transforming into commercial hotels, and the hidden stage of homelessness became evident. This was a significant trigger factor towards large-scale homelessness, but other causes of homelessness similar to those found in the neighbouring EU-15 member states, were also evident.

Another significant group of homeless persons occurred when 15,000 people, mostly men, were released from prison in three waves during January 1990, after Havel's presidential amnesty; thousands of them remained without a home. They survived mainly in and around railway stations. This was practically the first encounter between the Czechoslovak public and the homeless. Occurring as it did in a very short period of time and in a very visible manner, the response was sporadic and disorganised, with assistance coming from individuals and small groups of citizens.

² Act 100/1960 Coll., Art. 19, par. 2:... *Working to the benefit of all is therefore a primary duty and the right to work a primary right of each citizen.*

In addition to those rendered homeless by the eclipse of the workers' hostels and the prison amnesty, in the early 1990's economic migrants became a significant issue of public concern. Many migrants, especially those employed illegally, lived and still live in a way very similar to the homeless. From the beginning of 1990, large groups of Romanians crossed Czechoslovakia by train *en route* to Germany. When the borders were closed to them, large groups of Romanian refugees remained in major railway stations, especially in Prague and North Bohemia. Public administration, which was in the process of transformation, was not prepared for such a situation.

The extent and nature of homelessness in the Czech Republic was first described in the publication '*Homelessness – Extreme Exclusion*' (Hradecká & Hradecký, 1996). The publication influenced the theory and practice of working with the homeless in the 1990's and became a textbook for students of social science and providers of social work in the Czech Republic.

Establishment of social services for the homeless

In the Czech Republic, the term 'social service' has a narrow applicability. It does not include for example: employment; housing; medical care; education; or the social protection of individuals, families and groups (Průša, 2003). Legal regulations valid until the end of 2006 were, in relation to the homeless, very vague and included the category of 'socially maladjusted citizens'.

The law places services for homeless people under the rubric of social prevention: low threshold day centres; overnight shelters; homeless hostels; halfway houses; and outreach programmes (street work). Hostel services usually follow a higher integration level after a night shelter. While according to the law a hostel must have a qualified social worker, this is not required for night shelters. Hostel services are often interconnected with a low-threshold day centre, while in some towns the connection is also with street work. Linking to a higher integration level, on the other hand, is very difficult. In the Czech Republic there is neither the service of supported housing nor a system of social housing for (former) homeless people. Only in exceptional and particular cases do social service providers succeed in coming to an agreement with a municipality on the rental of an apartment for the service of supported transitional housing (Hradecký, 2007)

It was not until 1991 that the first day centres were opened, offering emergency assistance, social and legal counselling, assistance in acquiring personal documents and dealing with authorities. The day centres started to provide meals for clients, offering facilities for personal hygiene, distribution of clothes and the organisation of cultural and educational programmes for their clients. A unique service is the GP consulting room in Prague from 1994 and in Olomouc from 2007.

Non-Profit Services in the Czech Republic

This section describes the emergence and development of the non-profit sector for homeless services in the Czech Republic. The change in the political climate after November 1989 enabled citizens to develop non-profit initiatives. Various types of societies and associations of citizens could then be established and begin to develop their activities. A range of factors can be identified as influencing the development of non-profit sector services for the homeless.

In the establishment of services for the homeless, the activity of churches and their members was surprisingly strong. Despite the low proportion of religious observance in the Czech Republic, church-based and religious organisations make up a significant share of the work with the homeless. Church organisations, especially the Catholic Caritas and Silesian Diaconia were able to develop their activities based on structures (even if limited) that already existed. One significant influence was the arrival of the Salvation Army. After 1990, the first 'non-confessional' social services for the homeless were formed, initially on a volunteer basis. Over time, volunteer organisations transformed into professional providers of social services. Especially in the initial period, the strong personal commitment of the founders of these new organisations and the influence of keen individuals was evident.

The state has given support to NGO's since 1991, and this public sector support was more significant in the Czech Republic than in Slovakia. This may help to explain why, in Slovakia, NGO services only started to emerge in a significant way in the mid-1990's and why no umbrella organisation exists to date. It is also significant that a national network of services developed quickly, rather than development remaining as a regionally uncoordinated set of structures which included an umbrella organisation. This is a significant achievement, since it has been argued (Frič *et al.*, 1998) that the forced centralisation of social organisations in the National Front under the Communist regime led to persistent distrust of non-profit organisations toward the setting up of federations and umbrella groups. This tended to keep the non-profit sector largely in a state of disorientation according to Frič *et al.* (1998).

Despite the importance of public sector funding, the system of funding of non-governmental social services remains volatile, resulting in continued uncertainty over sustaining services. The development of the sector has depended upon the strength of NGO's to overcome these funding uncertainties (including the substantially below-standard wages of employees). Despite this situation, the sector is trusted by the public authorities, as evidenced by the fact that people from NGO's have taken an active part in the creation of social services quality standards, submitted their comments on the proposed Social Services Act and participated in NAPS/Inclusion. The Social Services Act requires that anyone who wants to provide any type of social service must register each service, which is then subject

to inspections and evaluation for compliance with the Standards for Quality in Social Services, with reference to a compendium of these standards. The aim of the law is to protect the rights of users and their human dignity as well as the promotion of principles of social inclusion. As a result, in 2005-2007, support from the European Social Fund for working with the homeless was effectively utilised in the development of non-profit sector services for the homeless.

Key NGO Providers of Homeless Services

Following the changes of 1990, diocesan charities began to be re-established. Parish and town charities of various orientations sprang up spontaneously around individual parishes, some of them volunteer-based, others providing professional social services. At the present time, there are over 350 parish, regional and town charities running over 500 social services projects.

Caritas is the largest non-governmental provider of social services, with a very wide range of activities across the country. It runs a total of fifteen day centres, fourteen night shelters, fifty-one hostels for homeless men and women and for mothers with children, and twelve halfway houses for young people leaving institutional care or coming out of prison (Caritas, 2007). As a Catholic-founded Church corporate body, Caritas exists as a network of organisations across Europe in which individual national Caritas organisations operate autonomously though with support from the network.

In contrast, the *Silesian Diaconia* was founded as a civic association in 1990 by one influential church member and now operates over fifty centres working almost exclusively in the Moravian-Silesian region of the country. Its first facility designed for the accommodation of men was established in September 1992; it later created a specialised section of homeless hostels including a halfway house, a day centre, night shelter and a therapeutic farm. An interesting project is '*From Eight to Four*' under Silesian Diaconia's EQUAL programme, implemented in 2005-2008 in partnership with Polish and Dutch partners. *Kofoed's School* in Ostrava commenced its activities towards the end of 2002 on the Danish model, as an initiative of the Silesian Diaconia with inspiration from Poland, where similar services have existed for several years. The service is directly linked with Silesian Diaconia's programme for the homeless. *Kofoed's School* maintains contact with its Danish-model organisation, but it is organisationally independent. Currently there are branches of *Kofoed's School* in six cities of the Czech Republic, especially in regions suffering from high unemployment.

The Salvation Army operated in Czechoslovakia from 1919 until 1951, when its activities were suspended by the communist regime. In December 1989, the Salvation Army International Headquarters in London received a letter from unknown people in Czechoslovakia, asking it to renew its activities. The Army's Netherlands Territory was asked by its headquarters to implement a return, which occurred in 1990 (Salvation Army, 1990). Once it was registered, the Salvation Army opened direct negotiations with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Their transnational operations opened doors with the authorities, influencing the shape of public funding. However, the Salvation Army has retained foreign leadership of its Czech services (mainly from the Netherlands) who have implemented models from their own countries, often without a sensitive approach to local specifics. The Army was able to establish itself quickly as a national organisation (registered as a Civic Association) with day centres, night shelters and hostels across the country. This has been significant in the development of service capacity.

In addition to these church-based or religiously inspired organisations, new civil society homeless agencies quickly emerged following the revolution. *Naděje* was created spontaneously in August 1990. Its operation was characteristic of that time; voluntary work with no operational funding, serving food in railway stations (initially to Romanian refugees). From this voluntary work in refugee camps, the idea of establishing a separate organisation was born. The organisation was founded by a married couple who enlisted the co-operation of a group of determined volunteers. *Naděje* is a charitable society, registered since 1990 as a civic association which only operates in the Czech Republic. Gradually, following its initial work in refugee camps, the services of *Naděje* were sought increasingly by Czech citizens who found themselves without a home. In 1991, its operations began in Prague with the first day centre, two hostels for men and another hostel for families with children.

Emauzy ČR (Emmaüs) was established in the Czech Republic in 1991. Its mission is to care for the homeless, released prisoners and marginalised persons, assisting in their return to civilian life. Its founder was jailed as a political prisoner under the previous regime. He had been considering the idea of starting an Emmaüs movement in Czechoslovakia even before 1989, as he had learned through personal experience that many people were imprisoned unjustly for so-called social parasitism. He found inspiration from the French movement founded in 1949 by Abbé Pierre. After Havel's amnesty, he made the final decision to establish *Emauzy* on the model imported from France, which was modified and defined as a 'friendly fellowship' rather than a social service. The project met with misunderstanding, both from the authorities and from the public and has faced extreme funding problems resulting in an organisational crisis in 2004-2005. Today it is stabilised and operates in three cities.

The *Prison Chaplaincy Care*, established in 1994 and involving all churches in an ecumenical initiative, is an original Czech model. The Prison Chaplaincy Care is active in prevention work, particularly aiming to eliminate homelessness through caring for those persons released from prisons who, especially after long-term sentences, lose their family support structure. The aim of Prison Chaplaincy Care is to create a sufficient social network of halfway houses (Balcarová, 2003).

Nový Prostor (New Space) was established in Prague in 1999 as a civic association in the area of social enterprise and promotion of social issues in a street-paper type magazine. It is a member of the International Network of Street Papers and publishes the *Nový Prostor* magazine. A drama group '*Ježek a Čížek*' (Hedgehog and siskin) was established within the organisation, performing in small theatres and festivals and becoming independent in 2003.

Models of work in NGOs

Using this understanding of the emergence and development of services provided by the non-profit sector, this section defines different types of non-profit organisation, which have emerged within homeless service provision. Right from the start two trends have been evident in the operation of NGOs – imported foreign models and original local concepts. In terms of the establishment and management of organisations working with the homeless, there is a parallel coexistence of organisations of domestic origin established through local initiatives, and organisations that are subject to international management or are part of international networks. Table 2 depicts the character of the players according to origin, establishment and management.

Table 2 – Models of work in Czech NGO's

Type of NGO	Name	Management
Church-based NGO with international central office	Salvation Army Sisters of the Mother Teresa	Managed from international (or non-Czech) HQ
Church-based national NGO	Caritas Silesian Diaconia ADRA Diaconias of other protestant churches	Directly involved in international networks
Non-church NGO with international central office	None	None
National NGO inspired by a foreign model	Emmaüs Kofoed's school Kolping's House Nový Prostor Czech Federation of Food Banks	Maintains formal or informal contacts with their foreign model
Original national NGO	Naděje Prison Chaplaincy Care Other regional and local NGOs (Exodus, DOM, SKP-centrum)	Independent agencies
NGOs' Networks	S.A.D.	Associates more than one hundred NGOs

Co-operation and Inter-agency working

As early as 1992, a professional association, the 'Association of Hostels' (S.A.D.) was founded, with membership consisting of hostels and halfway houses from the entire Czech Republic. This organisation, which has now 108 members, including governmental, non-governmental, municipal and church hostels, defined its own standards for the operation of a hostel soon after its establishment. To become a member, the hostel must meet these standards and have a clear and consistent conceptual plan (Hradecký, 2007).

S.A.D. was instrumental in preparing a professional training course for managerial staff of hostels, which was successfully established in 1998. It also operates the NPV computer program, mapping basic information on the homeless in the Czech Republic. S.A.D. co-operates with other entities and provides assistance in the establishment of new homeless hostels. It offers possibilities for consultation, student internships and the induction of new staff. In 2002, in co-operation with another organisation, it prepared a series of four one-week training courses on the theme of domestic violence (Cveček, *et al.*, 2007).

S.A.D. carried out the five-partner project 'Strategy for Social Inclusion of the Homeless in the Czech Republic', funded by the European Social Fund. The project consisted of several inter-related activities focusing on definition and typology. It mapped the then current state of homelessness, researched the health condition of the homeless in the Czech Republic, and verified the effectiveness of a higher number of social workers in social service facilities and the employment of the homeless. Its partners were Caritas, The Salvation Army, Naděje and Silesian Diaconia (Cveček, *et al.*, 2007).

The Homeless Census project was carried out in 2004 by NGOs operating in Prague in co-operation with the Municipal Centre of Social Services. Its aim was to establish, as accurately as possible, the number of homeless people in Prague. It focused on evident homelessness, defined through ETHOS definitions in the categories of 'roofless' and 'houseless' (Hradecký *et al.*, 2004). This project was replicated in Brno, in co-operation with the municipality (Brno City, 2006).

Informal co-operation has its tradition especially in Prague, where three large NGOs, Caritas, The Salvation Army and Naděje all operate. For several years these organisations have co-operated in the running of a winter night shelter and, in January 2006, on the operation of the winter emergency centre in military tents set up in Prague by the municipal authorities (Varga, 2006). Their workers participated, together with the city authorities, on several analytical and conceptual documents and on the homeless census project (Hradecký *et al.*, 2004).

Conclusion

The current situation in the Czech Republic can be considered transitional, since the capacity of services for the homeless are still in a stage of development. One ongoing problem is the immature funding system in conjunction with the limited funding from public sources. Within this context, this article has described a situation in which service development occurred very quickly following the collapse of Communism. The emergence and development of a non-profit sector of homeless service providers, as well as in other social services in general, was dependent on a number of factors. The role of the churches has been described as being significant. Equally, however, the intervention of international organisations and especially the Salvation Army was important in the rapid establishment of a national framework of services. This was also important in influencing the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in guiding public funding. Charismatic individuals were also important catalysts in the establishment of the non-church-based civic association forms of NGO.

Based on existing knowledge, the Czech Republic is typical of other CEE states in this regard (Salomon and Anheier, 1996). Where it may be less typical, is in the early formation of an umbrella organisation (SAD) of homeless service providers and in the extent of inter-agency co-operation this has stimulated. This has also played an important role in establishing service standards and in cementing the trust of public authorities in the sector. However, it remains the case that while the sector is dependent upon public sector funding for more than half of its revenue, funding constraints remain a significant factor in the development of service capacity. While European funding has been important in stimulating service development in 2005-2007, it is not being replaced quickly enough by sustainable state and municipal funding.

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