



WORKING WITH HOMELESSNESS

A multi-site European photovoice project



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 726997.

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An European multi-site photovoice project

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**WORKING WITH
HOMELESSNESS**



Introduction

The pictures shown in this report are the result of scientific research carried out in eight European countries. I would like to underline the term scientific research to provide the readers the key to interpreting this series of images.

For a couple of years now, visual language has been one of the tools of psychosocial research.

In particular, the methodology used in this case, photovoice, has its roots in the work of documentary photography and in the theories of Paolo Freire. According to Wang, the use of photographic language allows the emergence of common problems through group discussion.

of human, social, and institutional relationships. Distance is an ingredient that characterizes the various relationships in which the social workers are immersed:

- distance in the helping relationship between social worker and client (finding the right balance is fundamental so that the accompaniment can be regarded as a success);
- distance in relationships within the work group (the team is the first protection network able to perform the function of support for the social workers);
- distance from institutions, citizens, other services (these relationships are less immediate but equally important in producing efficiency).

Therefore, we grouped the photos according to these three forms of distance, giving voice to European social workers and showing how, in the end, a unique “European” identity can be traced, in which the relationships constitute a system with similar denominators.

We dealt with one other question in our research: the difference between various working models, which can be summarized as the housing first model versus the traditional form of homelessness assistance (shelter). It is evident from the images that the housing first model is more effective than the traditional model.

What are the common problems for groups of social workers working with homeless people in very different countries and cultural contexts? We chose the photovoice technique to try to find the answers to this question. In particular, we asked social workers to take pictures from their points of view that answered the following question: What are the characteristics of the work organization that facilitate/hinder proper functioning?

The social workers from each organization identified specific issues. Thanks to the shooting and sharing of photographs, each staff member was able to increase his or her awareness of the strengths, problems, and aspects that can improve his or her working environment, develop possible proposals, and positively encourage change through individual and group action. Therefore, the photovoice method represented an opportunity for expression and comparison to promote organizational change at the local level.

We aggregated the pictures in the report to identify transversal themes in the eight countries (France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden) that go beyond the strengths or weaknesses of the individual operational units. In particular, we chose to start from the theme of interpersonal distance: distance/closeness as a characteristic

We offer two warnings, without which analysis of the images is likely to lead to erroneous interpretations. The first warning is that the reading and production of images was not tied to aesthetic criteria. These photos are not the result of a creative photography workshop or a course for amateur photographers attracted by the discreet charm of poverty and the condition of homeless people. The second warning is that the photographs are not social reportage or punctual documentation of a phenomenon carried out by information or communication professionals, but simply the result of a collective debate, of collected voices, from Europe that express a cohesive perspective.

We believe that for the most attentive observer it will not be difficult to grasp the various implications that emerge from the images, which are able to suggest ways to promote social change to social workers, citizens and administrators.

WORKING WITH HOMELESSNESS





The global aim of the HOME_EU project is to provide a comprehensive understanding on how the Europeans perceive, tolerate and contest to the inequality. As a case study of an extreme expression of unfairness the research was designed to provide a compressive series of data on the dimensions involved in transformative and innovative social change. 12 istitutions from eight European countries (France, Ireland, Italy, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden) collaborated in the project, that is coordinated by prof. Ornelas, Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada, Lisbon).





THE PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

Photovoice is a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR), a method of collaborative research that involves increased understanding of an issue of concern and efforts aimed at improving social conditions through individual and group action.



METHODOLOGY





The photos are a selection of 17 photovoice projects made in the countries participating in the HOME_EU project.

A total of 82 providers (professionals and volunteers) aged between 24 and 68 participated. Each participant took pictures that answered the following questions:

“Which organizational features promote an effective functioning of the organization? homeless people?”

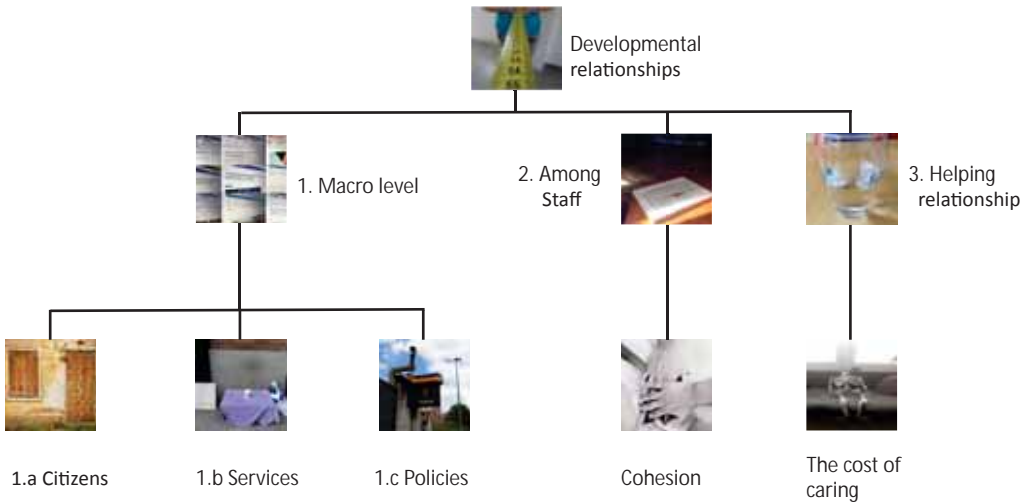
“What are the main obstacles to the functioning of the organization?”

Each participant was invited to describe their photos to the group and to express the message he wanted to communicate through the image, trying to place the content in the positive aspects of the organization or in the obstacles.

This was followed by a group discussion aimed at gathering the shared themes and the factors that, according to their perception, explained the theme that emerged.

MAIN RESULTS

Developmental relationships are characterised by reciprocal human interactions that embody an enduring emotional attachment, a progressively more complex pattern of joint activity and a balance of power.



Developmental relationships constitute the active ingredient of effective interventions serving homeless people across setting

CITIZENS

“... no possibility of dialogue... sometimes it is a very strong attitude ... they started saying “ who are those guys there? “ Maybe they do not tell this to your face, but is their thought”

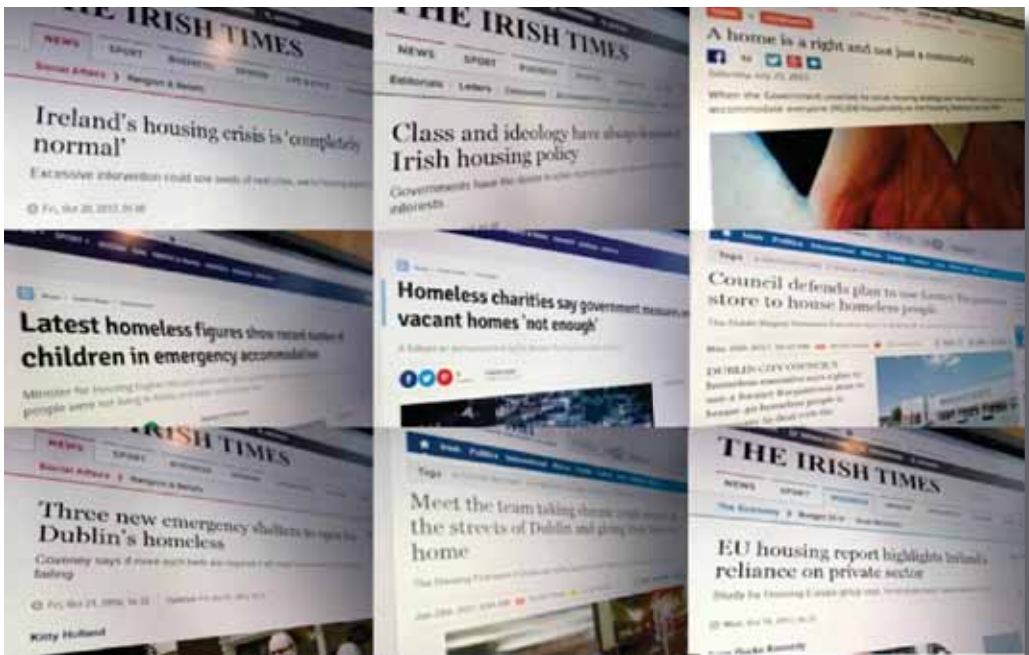


NOT ALL COMMUNITIES ARE READY TO OPEN THEIR DOORS



MEDIA & CITIZENS

“Media is a challenge. This is a collection of headlines around homelessness and housing. There’s a new headline every one to three days... some of them are complimentary, some are contradictory”. The ways in which the Irish media cover homelessness represents “two different ideologies : a housing crisis...or a systemic or policy issue”



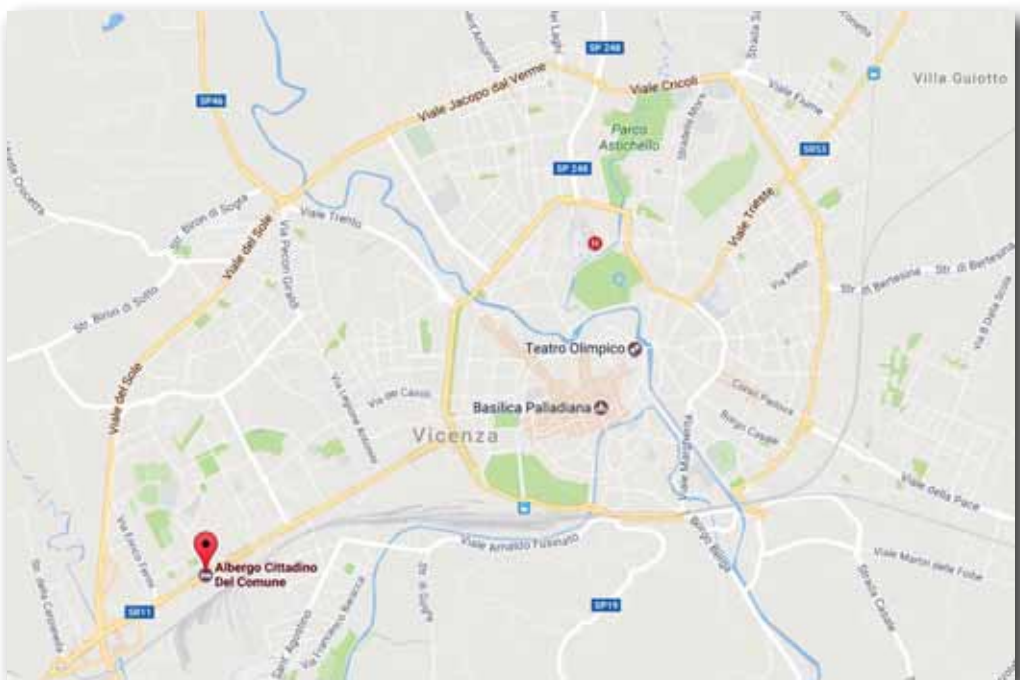
LOCATION OF SERVICES

“The location of the service is an obstacle because it is far from the center of the city and difficult to reach.”



Lisbona

Vicenza



OTHER SERVICES

“The housing is not enough. The life gives many turns and, sometimes, when it seems that you can smile, something blows that away and brings defenselessness. I accompanied a user when she denounces being a victim of a swindle. Her alternative was to go and look for the person who tricked her. My help is done together the alternative way. Today, I deserve her confidence”

THE DARK FACE OF REALITY



COMMUNITY SERVICES

“... that day I walked a lot before I realized where to go.
This signals the difficulty in interacting with an external
service “



TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN



POLITICIANS AND CITIZENS

“The general public and the politicians also seem to see homelessness as ‘not my problem . . . just another gentleman and he’s probably asleep and homeless . . . probably safer sleeping during the day than at night time.’ Members of society have gotten ‘so used to it, so used to seeing it, it’s the norm almost . . . People have now gone around the city centre blocking it out.”

THE BLOCK



SOCIAL POLICIES

Working with users for better policies

O SENHOR PRESIDENTE
DA REPÚBLICA, QUER "ISTO"
RESOLVIDO ATÉ 2023!?
É MELHOR DEITAR-ME MAIS
UM POUCO QUE A ESPERA
AÍND A VAI SER LONGA!!!



POLICIES

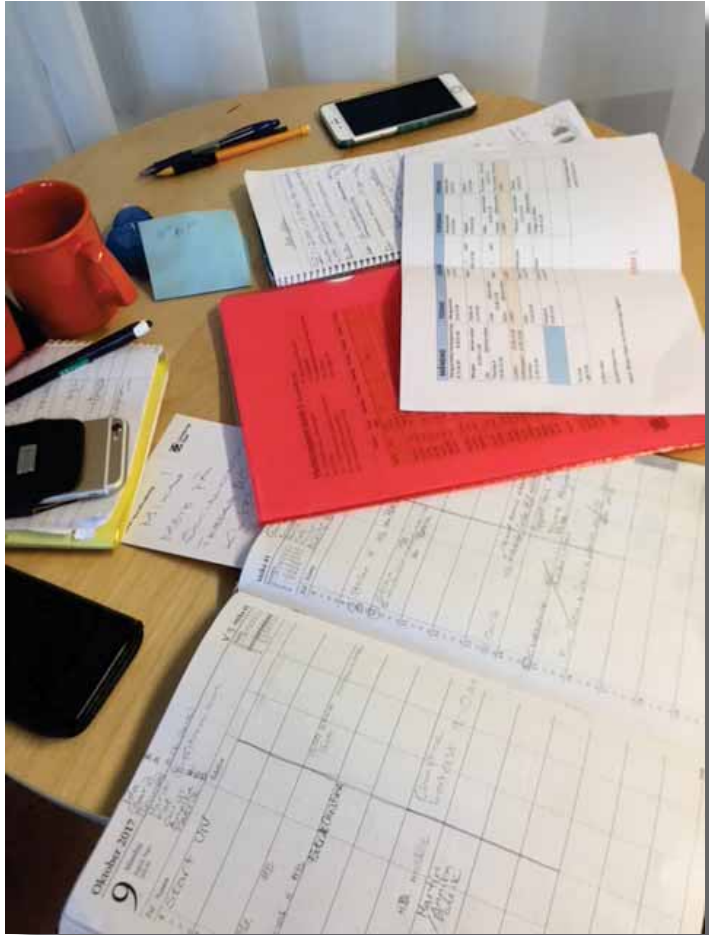
“Often, we think that the street furniture is used as a bed by the persons without a home. That’s a paradox, for every time there are fewer benches in our city, because some politicians wanted to hide the problematics, eliminating them”

A BED OUTDOORS



WITHIN THE STAFF

"... too busy"

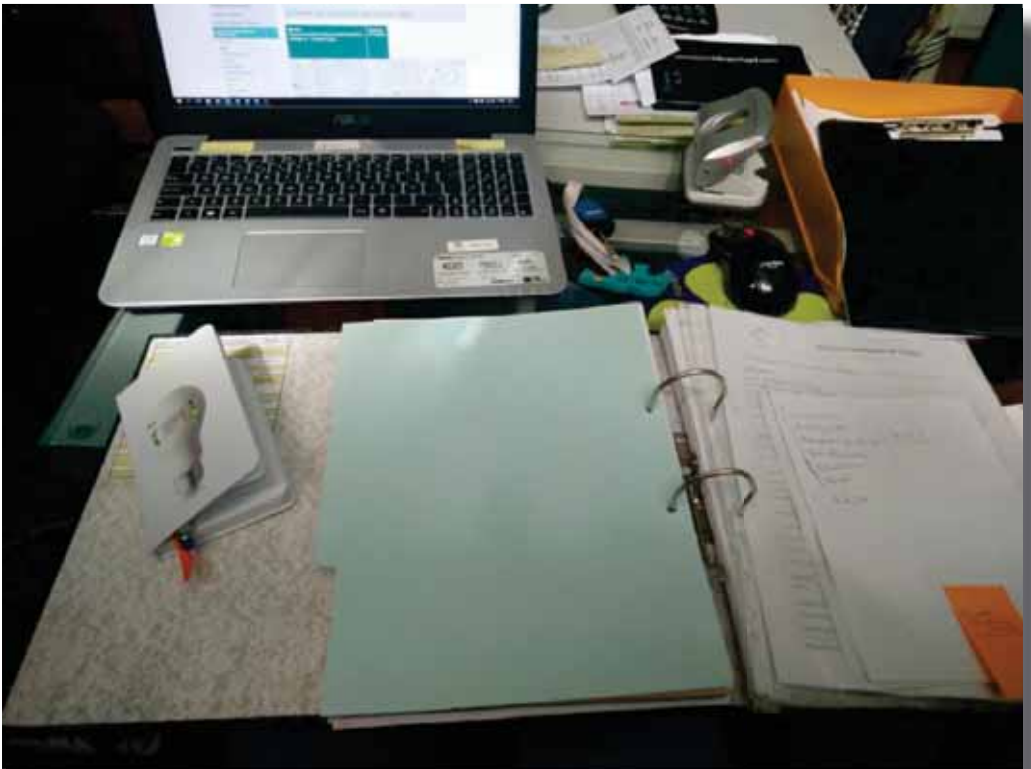


HINDRANCE



WITHIN THE STAFF

“Office work is both a strength and a weakness. Strength, since it allows you to follow the paths of users, important calls. Weakness because many times we stay behind a desk and we do not take care of people “



WITHIN THE STAFF

“... colleagues in the office discuss in an informal way some aspects of the cases at their work.

Sharing with colleagues helps them to manage in a better way the emotional charges of working with service users”

SHARED YOUR LOAD, IT WILL WEIGH LESS



WITHIN THE STAFF

“What is important in the work of a helper is the ability to distinguish between responsibility for someone and responsibility towards someone... We, as like these helpers, have full responsibility for these people, in order to improve their quality of life, competence, and skills day by day”

DESIDERATA



WITHIN THE STAFF

“Help the helper.

A service provider who is drowning is not able to help anyone”

SAFE THE LIFEGUARD



WITHIN THE STAFF

“...only if the team is united it can better meet the challenges; the team spirit leads to believe in what you do”



WITHIN THE STAFF

“Here we see the “horizontality” idea, we do not distinguish the roles/duties of each other, including head managers. Everyone discusses with everyone. It’s a moment of informal information sharing. The team likes these moments”

TEAM SPIRIT



WITHIN THE STAFF

“...two bowls. One is full of colourful jelly beans, and the other one is empty: there are two sides to working in HF. On the one side:

...have an awful lot...a really good team... a really good model... a lot of support...there's loads of really good stuff. We have things that no other services have. We have transport...we have two offices...

On the flip side, however:

...we have vans, but we don't have enough... we have two offices... which means that at times it can be hard to make sure that everyone is okay... if they are safe, what they are doing, whose even in today...”



BOTH GOOD & BAD



WITHIN THE STAFF

“A safe and trustworthy team.

We can share everything with each other,
we are always there for each other”



COHESION AND CONNECTION



"Standing together as a team"

WITHIN THE STAFF

“Good mutual cooperation and open multidisciplinary communication within the organization”

FEEDBACK AND COMMUNICATION



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

“The patient of the Center allows you to crawl
the young snapper in his hands to move him
from the busy pavement into the grass”

GIVE YOUR HAND



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

“The client was waiting for a visit so he took a picture of a Halloween decoration on the chair and sent it to the worker and said: this is me, waiting for you. This was further evidence that in their own home, you see different sides to clients, including humor”



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

“Finding a balance between what the professional does for the client and what the client can do”



SELF-GOVERNAMENT AND BALANCE



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

“Here we are in the paradox. We are in a collective structure, in a collective room. And what we are fighting for so, to give meaning, is: to be as close as possible to the person. And the paradox is that the individual within the collective no longer has its place with the new modalities. Here, it is a way of humanising the collective. It’s humanity within a collective”

AN ASIDE IN A COLLECTIVE



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

On the side of the volunteers, the intention and the desire to build a relationship of trust and closeness is authentic and explicit; this intention is also perceived by the informal invitations addressed to guests, who, however, often do not accept, preferring solitude

THANKS FOR THE INVITATION,
I HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT...



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

EFFECTIVE SUPPORT - HOME VISIT



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

EFFECTIVE SUPPORT



HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

UNCONDITIONALITY?

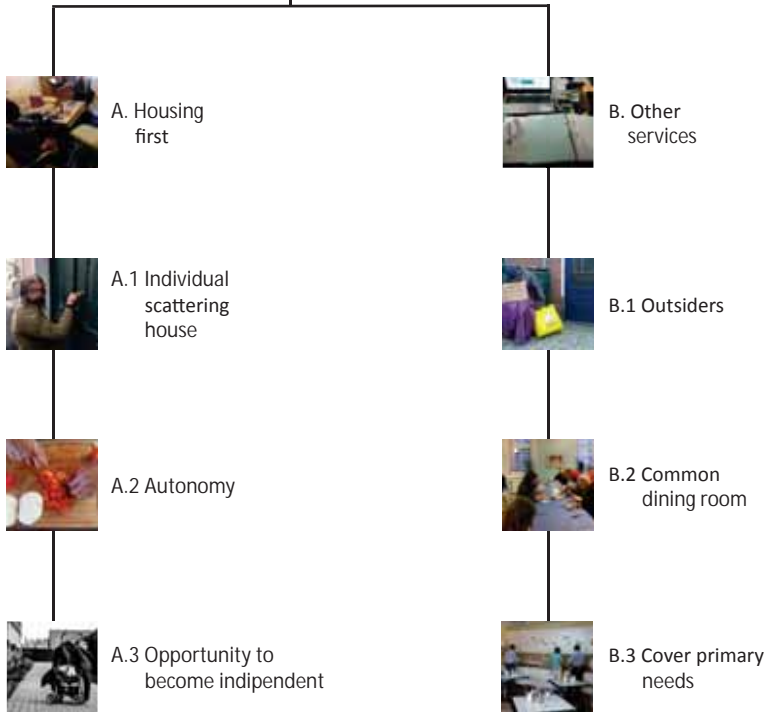


COMPARING WORKING MODELS





Comparing working models



HOUSING FIRST



“To people living in individual, permanent, scattered, integrated houses, with the community”

OTHER SERVICES

THE OUTSIDER



“Having no place where you are welcome,
living on the street...”

HOUSING FIRST



THE FUTURE IN MY HANDS

"A. prepares the food to celebrate his year of permanence in the house.

A. has great skills in the kitchen, and he will shortly begin a cooking training. He's wants to obtain a job that allows him to be economically independent. He always dreamed of being a chef. Having a house has contributed to motivate him, and he's already closer to his aim."

OTHER SERVICES

“COMMUNITY: Here you live in a small apartment without kitchen and you eat in a common dining room”



HOUSING FIRST



“Finally, we received a flat and we got a chance to become independent. We set off on a journey to realize our dreams! We must remember to use the given opportunity”

OTHER SERVICES



THE BASICS

Objective: to cover basic primary needs for persons without resources



Postscript: Some Elements to Contextualize the Research

1. Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory research-action methodology. Above all, it is used in the field of public health or within social health projects to analyze needs and promote changes in life contexts relevant to people.

With this methodology people can identify, represent, and improve the contexts in which they are inserted using the photographic language (Santinello & Vieno, 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997), becoming an active part in the processes of analysis, decision, and change.

According to Wang (1999), the photos facilitate the emergence of reflections in the participants and the identification of common problems through group discussion. Therefore, through photovoice it would be possible to reach the goal of analyzing the points of view of people living in a specific context, which are different from the views of those who exercise control and power in that context (Wang, 1999).

This methodology has been used in different contexts and with homeless people (Hergerather, Rhodes, Cowan,

Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Gaboardi et al., 2018; Pruitt et al., 2018).

The experiences documented in the literature of using photovoice to analyze work situations appear to be quite limited (Flum et al., 2010), including the literature on services for homeless people.

2. Working With Homeless People

A debate has recently taken place on two different working models of helping the homeless: the staircase model and the housing first model (Cortese, 2016). The first provides that a person follows some steps before reaching independent housing (street, shelter, group apartment, etc.); the other provides that a person is given a home as a first step for a path to autonomy and recovery.

The debate is over which of the two models is more effective in terms of change in homeless people, differences in costs, or social impact. Beyond this, authors of a few studies have analyzed the organizational characteristics that actually facilitate working with the ho-

meless and determined the elements that help social workers to work in contexts that are often difficult and put them at risk of stress.

Despite the limitations of the research, the most frequent and widespread problems among the services to homeless people or marginalized people can be summarized by three different levels.

The first concerns the contextual factors (e.g., the problems related to refugee emergencies; Macnaughton et al., 2015), which create workload situations that are difficult to foresee. Moreover, Rapp et al. (2010) documented the importance of developing collaborations with the various local services in the community (e.g., social, health, justice, and employment agencies) and with the neighborhoods where the services are to promote social integration of the clients, as well as the perception of effectiveness in the team.

The second level concerns organizational factors. The organizations that deal with these problems are often small organizations and cooperatives with light and undefined structures, for which changes in workloads pose instability problems that are not easy to deal with. Moreover, a clear definition of the professional role, skills, and principles or vision that characterizes the philosophy or culture of the organization that pro-

vides the service does not always exist. Damschroeder et al. (2009) argued that work teams should not only be characterized by good professional skills, but also by a strong congruence between the values and beliefs of the staff and those that characterize the philosophy of the program within which the social workers are inserted.

The third level concerns the relationship with clients that is characterized by complex challenges and in which it is not easy to accompany them on a pathway to autonomy. Often they are people with multiple problems who add further problems such as substance abuse and mental and/or physical health issues and who have a homelessness history of many years.

The aim of the present research is to explore, through the photovoice methodology, which factors are perceived as hindering or facilitating the work effectiveness in teams working with homeless people.

3. The HOME-EU Project

This research is part of the European project HOME_EU: Homelessness as Unfairness, funded by the European Community through Horizon 2020, a program dedicated to research and innovation.

For the analysis of the social workers'

points of view, we started from the photovoice methodology. The same research protocol was implemented in all the European states involved in the project. The European Ethics Commission approved the research protocol. In the project, 12 institutions from eight European countries (France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) collaborated.

The project was coordinated by Prof. Ornelas, of the Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada, Lisbon.

4. Methodology

Photovoice is a participatory research-action model through which people can identify, represent, and improve the contexts in which they are inserted through the photographic language (Santinello & Vieno, 2013).

Thanks to the shooting and sharing of photographs, photovoice promotes awareness of the strengths, problems, and aspects to be improved in the community to which a photographer belongs and favors positive change through individual and group action; therefore, it represents a space for expression and comparison to promote social change and collective awareness.

Procedure and Sample

The research protocol common to the partners included a photovoice process

divided into five meetings of 2 h each every 2 weeks. Then, based on the various specific situations, the model was adapted and modulated in each country.

However, the main phases of the process are as follows:

a) Meetings dedicated to the presentation of research and the introduction to the photovoice model, highlighting the objectives, aims, and role of the participants.

b) At the end of this phase, the photographic task was assigned to answer the following questions:

1. Which characteristics of the work organization facilitate its effectiveness?

2. What are the main obstacles to achieving the organization's goals?

c) The production of photographs and their group discussion.

Each participant was asked to take, in the following days, at least five photographs to answer the proposed questions. The participants were to send the photos within a set date to the research group that would print them for the next meeting.

The final phase was focused on the group discussion of the photos taken.

Each participant was invited to describe his or her photos to the group and to express the message he or she wanted to communicate through the image, trying to place the emerging theme in positive aspects of or obstacles to their

work.

This was followed by a group discussion aimed at deepening the raised themes and grasping the shared themes and the factors that, according to their perception, explained the themes that emerged.

At the end of the fourth meeting the issues emerged. Those that appeared most relevant and possible strategies and actions of change identified and suggested by social workers were summarized by teams.

The photos presented in this report are a selection of 17 photovoice projects developed in the countries participating in the project. A total of 82 social workers (professionals and volunteers), from 24 to 68 years old, were involved.

The Process of Data Analysis

Each research group was asked to select the most significant photographs with the participants. Each shot was then submitted to content analysis by two independent researchers.

In this report, the photos constitute an exhibition that has been hosted in various cultural events and initiatives aimed at promoting greater awareness of the issue of working with homeless people. We tried to grasp the elements common to the groups and therefore to the services of the different countries

involved in the Home-EU project.

However, contrary to what was expected from the photographic tasks and the objectives of the research (whose results are the subject of other contributions,(e.g., proceedings of the 3rd International Housing First Conference), we preferred not to be guided by the questions but to let the images guide us, so that the contents emerged regardless of the initial intentions. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, we tried to identify results that could orientate a new analysis of the organizations operating in this sector.

Results

From the analysis of the photos the role of the relational component has emerged in a relevant way. Success or obstacles are almost always results associated with a situation that implies a relationship.

Therefore, three major categories of relationship were identified:

First is the macro-level, as the relations with the context within the service works. Thus, the first series of photographs tells of the importance that social workers attribute to the relationships with political institutions, but also with citizens and with other local services.

The attitudes of "others" is a factor often overlooked, but experienced as

very important by the participants; for example, the caption of photo on pag. 31:

“The general public and the politicians also seem to see homelessness as ‘not my problem . . . just another gentleman and he’s probably asleep and homeless . . . probably safer sleeping during the day than at night time.’ Members of society have gotten ‘so used to it, so used to seeing it, it’s the norm almost . . . People have now gone around the city centre blocking it out.”

If the importance perceived by the relationship with the institutions is not surprising, then the more interesting is the perceived importance of the relationship with citizens, with the wider community. The photo on pag. 21 tells with great force the importance attributed to the attitude of the population:

“No possibility of dialogue . . . sometimes it is a very strong attitude . . . they started saying ‘who are those guys there?’ Maybe they do not tell this to your face, but it is their thought.”

The image speaks more than words: the doors and windows of the building are walled, closed so as not to allow any possibility of access. The writing on the wall is fading, and one can see a question mark on the left. Without doors and windows, the wall takes on a very strong symbolic meaning.

The second category of reports documented by the photographs concerns the relationships within the working group of the service. This is a classic theme of the analysis of organizations. In the analyzed photographs, the recurring themes ranged from the difficulties related to the bureaucratic aspects of the work to the importance of supporting each other.

So, photos such as on pag. 39 occur in all the photovoice projects. The bureaucratic aspect of the work also weighs heavily on the relationship with the clients.

“Office work is both a strength and a weakness. Strength since it allows you to follow the paths of clients, important calls. Weakness because many times we stay behind a desk and we do not take care of people.”

Computers, files, forms to fill, calendars to respect, and constraints that condition the work were captured.

Social workers are aware of the complexity of relationships within the staff and how they constitute a risk and a possible source of support (e.g., photo on pag. 51):

“Two bowls. One is full of colourful jelly beans, and the other one is empty. There are two sides to working in HF. On the one side . . . [we have] a really good team . . . a really good model . . . a lot of

support. . . . There's loads of really good stuff. We have things that no other services have. We have transport . . . we have two offices. . . .

"On the flip side, however . . . we have vans, but we don't have enough. . . . We have two offices . . . which means that at times it can be hard to make sure that everyone is okay. . . if they are safe, what they are doing, whose is even in today. . . ."

The third category is the relationship with the service clients. The recurring theme is the "right distance" (i.e., finding a balance between involvement and detachment appears very difficult). Photo on pag. 61 shows the classic glass-half-full scenario:

"Finding a balance between what the professional does for the client and what the client can do."

A relationship can be full of many implications and told with images that do not neglect a touch of humor (photo on pag. 59):

"The client was waiting for a visit so he took a picture of a Halloween decoration on the chair and sent it to the worker and said: this is me, waiting for you. This was further evidence that in their own home, you see different sides to clients, including humor."

Finally, we proceed to the last part of this report to present some photos that

better documented the traditional services and those that represented the housing first model. The photos document in a clear way the operational differences that derive from the principles to which the different organizational models refer.

Conclusions

Almost always, the theme of working with the homeless seems to be reduced to questions of social policies, economic direction, and availability of resources. These few photographs seem to suggest and identify that in addition to policies and economic resources it is important to pay attention to how these services work.

These are highly relational organizational environments, where the quality of relationships can make the difference. The photographs and the stories of the social workers underline so often the relationships. Thus, most likely social relations can be considered the active ingredient (analogous to pharmacological treatment); that is, the element able to produce the expected change. Therefore, supporting and improving these organizations means working on the relationships that social workers use to interact with the external environment, among themselves, and with clients.

Studying how the characteristics of the organizational environment are able to

maximize results therefore implies understanding how to create conditions for these relationships to work.

In this direction, it might be useful to take inspiration from models such as the nurturing environments model (Biglan et al., 2012), which is oriented to minimize the likelihood of negative (toxic) events occurring and which promotes self-regulating behaviors and all of the skills needed to become productive, adult members of society.

Therefore, if it is important to generate such organizations, then the importance of understanding what mechanisms are underlie to interpersonal relationships, which we have defined as the main ingredient of these environments, should not be underestimated.

Over the years, many ways of analyzing and interpreting relationships have been proposed, especially when discussing a helping relationship. Often, one of the lenses used is that of the "therapeutic alliance," which started in the psychoanalytic field and subsequently expanded to different sectors and also became a series of instruments for the measurement of its dimensions and characteristics (Bordin, 1980).

But the analysis of the photographs recalled the framework proposed by Li and Julian (2012), who proposed the

idea of a "developmental relationship" as one that is able to play the role of active ingredient in any program.

This relationship has been operationalized into four characteristics: power, emotional attachment, progressive complexity, and reciprocity. The reference to Bronfenbrenner (1979) and dyadic interactions is explicit. A developing relationship would be that which, through the interaction between people, gradually activates a process in which the four characteristics are modified in an interdependent way.

Some photographs seem to identify the characteristics of these relationships:

a) Regarding the power in a relationship (photo on pag. 61):

"Finding a balance between what the professional does for the client and what the client can do."

b) Emotional attachment is easily reappraised, for example in photo on pag. 66:

"On the side of the volunteers, the intention and the desire to build a relationship of trust and closeness is authentic and explicit; this intention is also perceived by the informal invitations addressed to guests, who, however, often do not accept, preferring solitude."

c) A relationship becomes more complex, enriching itself over time (photo on pag. 64):

“Here we are in the paradox. We are in a collective structure, in a collective room. And what we are fighting is to be as close as possible to the person. And the paradox is that the individual within the collective no longer has its place with the new modalities. Here, it is a way of humanizing the collective. It’s humanity within a collective.”

d) The last element is that of reciprocity, as we can see in the photo on pag. 73:

“It is the unconditional welcome of people and all that it raises: our limits, our fears, our representations, the dangers, the violence. So ‘unconditional’, yes, but at what price?”

The reciprocity of the interaction also has implications that slip into the toll that the helping relationship can have for the social worker in terms of burnout.

Therefore, the importance of considering an increase in the quality of relationships as one of the primary objectives of each program is clear. This is rarely found in the agendas of politicians and policies dedicated to this field. The design and management of a service could therefore result in identifying which conditions and characteristics favor the strengthening of developing relationships or settings. So, it is important understanding and planning how a service is set up to encourage the development

of these relationships to promote real change that lasts over time and is able to transform people and environments. In these environments, the reciprocity of the interaction can also lead to burnout of the social workers of a service for homeless people.

The photos presented in this report not only document but suggest, stimulate, and indicate possible new paths able to give additional quality to the work of these social workers.

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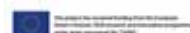
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Working with homelessness

June 18th-26th 2018
9.00-18.00

Opening exhibition
June 18th, 2018
6.00 pm

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Palazzo Moroni-cortile pensile