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The Poor in Mass Media

Negative Images in the USA and UK versus Positive Images in Sweden and Denmark

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Published in:
Homeless in Europe

Publication date:
2014

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (APA):
Larsen, C. A. (2014). The Poor in Mass Media: Negative Images in the USA and UK versus Positive Images in Sweden and Denmark. *Homeless in Europe*, *2014*(Spring), 5-6.

Homeless in Europe

Getting it Right: Communicating About Homelessness

FEANTSA

Editorial

Getting it Right: Communicating About Homelessness

Communicating about homelessness is important for NGOs and activist groups working towards ending homelessness. The way they present homelessness can help to dispel negative stereotypes that can be a barrier to public interest in the issue but also to political will to change the situations that cause homelessness and keep people in homelessness. It can explain solutions to homelessness, and why they matter, to the people experiencing homelessness themselves as well as to the wider society. It can also show the value of homelessness services, but also the value of the individuals who use them, who are capable citizens worthy of respect and deserving of a decent home, just like everybody else.

Words matter. Referring to someone as 'a homeless person' or a 'person experiencing homelessness', talking about their living situation rather than something that defines them, shows homeless people as people and as individuals, and does not 'other' them in a way that encourages audiences not to identify with them and therefore ignore them or negate the importance of supporting them to exit that situation. The same wish to talk about homeless people in a humanising and positive way is present in languages other than English, such as in the Spanish 'personas sin hogar' and 'le persone senza dimora' in Italian. Giving homeless people a voice can show what they need and can contribute to changing perceptions about homeless people.

Images matter too, at least as much as – if not more than – words. The kinds of pictures used in all types of media – newspapers, online press, reports, film and video, photography, art and others – can colour the way the audience see homeless people. Images that perpetuate stereotypes about homeless people and imply that all homeless people are the same and live in the same way reinforces erroneous ideas like 'homeless people chose that existence' or 'homelessness is just a fact of life and cannot be ended'. Combating stereotypes empowers homeless people and creates a positive image of them, as well as showing that homelessness is not a permanent condition, it is a living situation that can change.[1]

Homeless activists and communicators working on homelessness can work with the press to encourage them to report differently about homelessness and homeless people, with politicians to encourage them to pursue successful policies that have been proven to end homelessness, and with the general public, press and politicians through new media to change perceptions and spread knowledge about what works and why we should end homelessness.

The articles that follow explore these issues and more and make the case for effective communication on homelessness, through a variety of channels.

Roughan Mac Namara, Advocacy Manager at Focus Ireland, starts off by outlining the priorities and challenges for homeless organisations when communicating about homelessness, discussing how to identify audience, evidence and speakers, using examples from Focus Ireland's work. He also talks about the importance of communications for dispelling myths and encouraging positive attitudes

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1   See the ETHOS Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en

towards homeless people and a will to make sure no one has to go through homelessness.

Christian Albrekt Larsen of the Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies at Aalborg University, Denmark, presents the correlation between welfare regimes and the presence of poverty in a country and the portrayal, whether positive or negative, of benefit recipients in that country's media. His article demonstrates how there can be a big difference between the prevalence of positive and negative portrayals of certain groups in different countries and discusses where stereotypes come from.

Rosa Quesada, Jonás Candalija and Beatriz Iraeta from EAPN Spain talk about the importance of the words used in the media to describe homeless people and show that negative terms can lead to a dehumanisation of homeless people which has even resulted in violence against them and the perpetrators' actions being effectively condoned by opinions that see homeless people as problems rather than people. They present their guide for journalists that gives more positive ways of presenting homeless people in the media.

The City is for All, a homeless-led advocacy group in Budapest, Hungary, give their own guide to writing about homelessness and homeless people which was developed with insight from homeless people and has been distributed to thousands of press workers and media organisations. They identify the problems in the traditional media portrayal of homeless people and offer solutions.

Anna Kwaśnik and Łukasz Browarczyk of the Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting Out of Homelessness, Poland, explore a new trend in the stigmatisation of homeless people – using them as fashion icons. They discuss what the implications of this new trend are and try to discern whether positive ideas for communicating about homeless people can be gleaned from an adapted version of the trend.

Marc Uhry from *Fondation Abbé Pierre* describes two types of awareness-raising campaign led by the foundation – a Twitter initiative that allowed people experiencing homelessness to tweet about their lives and receive backup from media professionals and award-winning poster campaigns that show the reality of homelessness and housing exclusion in a hard-hitting and thought-provoking way.

Henrique Pinto of CAIS Association describes CAIS's use of the media as a tool to promote political change and the importance of spreading the message that everyone is entitled to enjoy their fundamental rights, which he says should be the basis of social work and assistance for homeless people, rather than it being considered just another social service. He mentions the attention CAIS's initiatives have even gained from European politicians, which is partly thanks to their media presence and political engagement.

FEANTSA would like to thank all the authors who contributed to this issue of the magazine.

The Priorities and Challenges for Homeless Organisations in Communicating About Homelessness

By **Roughan Mac Namara**,[1] *Advocacy Manager with the Irish housing and homeless charity Focus Ireland,*[2] *Ireland*

> A mistake some charities make when communicating with a range of different audiences is they take the view that the work they do is good so people should agree with their aims on that basis alone.

Language is used as a tool by everyone in every walk of life. The words we choose to use to communicate any message carry importance as the choice of words determines how your message will be received, what will be communicated and what the outcome will be.

A person may believe they have been very clear in communicating a message. However, their audience could very well hear something totally different because of how the message was presented. In such a case, the person would often be blissfully unaware that their effort has failed to achieve what they wanted to communicate.

How many times in our everyday lives do we hear people say: "No, that is not what I meant."?

I think the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw explained this problem very well when he said:

> *"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."*

There are so many issues to consider when reflecting on the challenges and priorities for homeless organisations in communicating about homelessness.

Rather than just touching briefly upon many issues I wish to give – I hope – some clear examples of how to communicate effectively in order to overcome the challenges faced in Focus Ireland's work.

I hope this approach will be useful to others working in communications and related areas. I always find it useful to hear how others approach similar challenges perhaps in a different way to how my organisation does in its work.

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

The main challenge faced by organisations is that homelessness is not viewed as a priority for many audiences they must communicate with to inform, influence and progress measures to tackle and prevent people from becoming homeless.

These audiences are mostly the same in every county: the government; opposition politicians; funders; local government; the media; donors; supporters; non-supporters; the people we work with who are homeless or at risk of losing their home and our own staff.

A mistake some charities make when communicating with a range of different audiences is they take the view that the work they do is good so people should agree with their aims on that basis alone.

However, if you wish to communicate effectively with any individual person or audience, there are a few questions you should always first consider, such as: What do they think about this subject? How much do they know about homelessness? Do they view it as an important issue and, if not, why not? And lastly why should they support our work?

Taking this approach is often referred to as "Knowing your audience." We have a saying in Ireland to explain something that is simple enough to understand. We say: "It is not rocket science!''

Well, knowing your audience is not rocket science, it should be simple but it's amazing to see how many people and organisations - from charities to politicians to celebrities - do not take this step. The result is a failure to communicate which leads to mis-communication which in turn often leads to a failure to achieve your aims.

FROM THEORY INTO PRACTICE

The best way to explain anything is often to give an example of how it works. To put theory into practice.

In 2011 and 2012, Ireland was in economic crisis and had to enter a bailout programme. The government was implementing funding cuts across many areas. One measure taken was it cut rent payments to people in need of support to secure a rented home. This payment is called Rent Supplement.

The Government justified the decision by saying the level of rents were falling around the country and that landlords or tenants in receipt of rent supplement would drop their rents in response to cuts in payments to the tenant. However, the reality was that rents in the properties in the lower end of the market were often static and landlords did not lower rents in response to lower rent supplement payments for tenants. This meant that many people were struggling to pay the rent and others who were homeless could not find a property they could afford to rent.

The Government was preparing to cut the rent payments again in the next Budget at the end of 2012. The media and general public were all largely in agreement as it was accepted – without any real proof or questioning – that rent payments should be cut again as inflated payments were keeping market rents higher than they should be in reality.

When seeking to campaign on this, Focus Ireland took the first steps outlined above and we made sure we knew our audience's position on the issue. We looked at how we could change this to prevent further cuts to rent payments to protect people who are at risk.

To do this, Focus Ireland carried out a small-scale research project called "Out of Reach" which found that the previous cuts had actually forced some people to become homeless despite the Government stating that this would not happen. This research was submitted to the Government and launched in the media. It gained good exposure which showed that the widespread belief that it was OK to cut rent payments was wrong and was actually causing people to become homeless.

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In one such case, a woman called Lisa Ryan became homeless directly because of rent supplement cuts. Focus Ireland worked to support her and she took part in the research and also spoke passionately about her experiences at the public launch of the research. Lisa was also interviewed on national television and radio stations.[3]

Focus Ireland ran a campaign on this issue highlighting this reality and calling for no more cuts in the Budget. This entailed asking the public to take part in an email campaign to politicians and our Advocacy staff lobbying the Minister and key people in her department.

By taking the time to examine what the audiences we needed to influence thought about the issue and planning how to convince them otherwise, Focus Ireland succeeded in communicating the reality that rent supplement cuts were causing homelessness and this was accepted by politicians, the media and many of the public. The result was that there were no Budget cuts to rent payments and a review took place the following year which actually raised payments in many areas.

This was a success for the people we work with and Focus Ireland. However, as with most social issues the battle continues and there are still serious difficulties in this area in terms of gaining access to housing which we continue to work and lobby on.

Now, the aim in outlining this campaign is not to try and show how clever and effective Focus Ireland staff are in our work (but you are welcome to think this if you wish to do so!). It is to provide a straight-forward example of how effective communications, research and advocacy all work together to inform, influence and change both policy and opinions about homelessness and its causes.

TACKLING STEREOTYPES AND CHALLENGING MYTHS

The other issue I wish to discuss, which is one of the biggest challenges facing organisations working with people who are homeless, is that many people do not care about the issue. They think that people who are homeless are in some way different to the rest of us. They define the person by the fact that they are homeless and blame them as they 'must be' a drunk, an addict or in some way responsible for their own position.

The characterisation of people in this way – intentionally or not – is called "othering" as it is trying to make other people different to us. Doing this means the problem of homelessness is not viewed as a real priority for many as it is not viewed as their problem. This happens at all levels from the Government right down to the man or woman in society who is not homeless.

The process of "othering" can be very direct in some cases as we have sadly seen in recent history in Europe and elsewhere. Or it can be more subtle when it comes to people's opinions and policies towards issues such as homelessness, poverty, hunger and famine in the developing world.

To tackle this problem, we must work with our customers to communicate with our audiences to show people who are homeless are the same as us. They have the same flesh and blood, the same hopes, dreams and passions but they are going through a difficult time. We must work to encourage everyone to see the person first and not the problem. It is the same across many issues. Often people will see and talk about a "disabled person" rather than "a person with a disability".

However, it is not all one-way traffic. Sometimes, with the best intentions in the world, organisations working on the issue of homelessness can actually fuel the flames of this issue by talking about "the homeless". The organisations don't mean any harm but this goes back to choosing your words very carefully when communicating.

A person working for a charity may talk about "the homeless" and not think this is positioning the people they are talking about as different to us. However, a person listening to them – it could be a member of the public, a journalist, a politician or anyone - may hear them talking about "The Homeless" as and think "That is that group of people over there who are all the same as each other and different to us".

It may seem like a pedantic point to some but this is the very reason Focus Ireland always speaks about "People who are homeless" and not "Homeless people."

One way organisations can address this issue is to seek opportunities to empower people who are homeless to have a voice, to speak about their problems but to also speak about their achievements and their interests. To show there are not different to us, as we are all just people living in different circumstances.

One project Focus Ireland worked on which tackled this subject was when we took part in a European project, UDENFOR, which put a range of statues depicting people who are homeless on display in several European cities during 2011. The statures were on display on the streets of Dublin during August 2011 and the project was a great success.

People engaged with the statues and got talking about what it meant, about homelessness about art and about the fact that people who are homeless are the same as us. They came from a home and hopefully will return to home and move on from being homeless.

One of our customers Des Murphy launched the campaign - which for the visit to Dublin was titled "Ending Homelessness". He spoke on national TV news programmes about the statues, his own love of art and how he hoped people would be encouraged by the exhibition to think about their own attitudes and understanding of homelessness.[4]

Most importantly he spoke of his own journey from homelessness back to home. To show this is possible and – as the vision of Focus Ireland states – that "Everyone has a right to a place they can all home."

We must work to encourage everyone to see the person first and not the problem.

3   The report can be viewed here http://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2012/1106/344496-focus-ireland-rent-report/
4   The report can be viewed here http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/0803/3017936-statues-highlight-problems-of-homeless-people/

The Poor in Mass Media: Negative Images in the US and UK versus Positive Images in Sweden and Denmark

By **Christian Albrekt Larsen**,[1] *Professor, Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark*

> Stories and pictures in the mass media form an important basis for creating opinions about "the poor" and welfare recipients.

Stories and pictures in the mass media form an important basis for creating opinions about "the poor" and welfare recipients. Media content influences who we think the poor and welfare recipients are, how they behave and what should be done to either help or punish them. I argue in my recent book, *The Rise and Fall of Social Cohesion* (Oxford University Press 2013), that the US and UK are caught in a vicious circle. High levels of poverty and a targeted welfare system produce a large amount of newsworthy negative stories about "the poor" and welfare recipients, which make further punishment the most likely political response. Who wants to help scroungers and spongers? In contrast, Sweden and Denmark are caught in a virtuous circle. Low levels of poverty and a universal welfare system lower the amount of newsworthy negative stories and give room for stories about the deserving poor. Who would not want to help their ordinary fellow citizens in need?

THE STUDY OF NEWSPAPERS

In order to substantiate this argument, I studied a sample of 1750 British, 1750 Danish and 1750 Swedish newspapers. My team and I covered five major newspapers published between 2004 and 2009. From a number of American studies, we already knew that the American mass media, in general, present poor and welfare recipients in a very stereotypical way. The "black man of the ghetto" and the "welfare queen" are well-established stereotypes. However, from the American studies it is hard to tell how much is caused by negative racial stereotypes and how much is simply caused by the (perceived) antisocial behaviour of poor people. In the book, I argue that it is not only a matter of race. Here the UK is an interesting case as the poor are (still) described as primarily a white phenomenon. This was established by simply calculating the amount of white and non-white persons in the pictures the newspapers attached to stories about poor and welfare recipients. But still the UK stereotypes are very similar to those found in the US. Sweden and Denmark are also interesting cases. From these countries we can learn how "those" at "the bottom of society" are described in societies with moderate levels of poverty and inequality. It turned out to be a world of difference.

THE POSITIVE STORIES

It is cumbersome and tricky to categorise mass media content. In the book, I developed a simple distinction between "negative", "positive" and "other" stories about poor and welfare recipients. A validity check was made by having different persons coding the same newspaper stories and pictures. As expected, the British newspapers had less positive stories about poor and welfare recipients than did Swedish and Danish newspapers. Stories about child poverty, pensioner poverty and absence of jobs are examples of "positive" stories. Stories about homelessness are typically also a framed as "positive" stories. The overall finding was that 41 percent of the British stories depict the media-poor in a "positive" light. In Sweden and Denmark, the share was respectively 62 and 55 percent. What keep the British stories somewhat positive were stories about old-age poverty and anti-poverty policies that ease the living conditions of those at the "bottom of society". However, in any case it is not the 'positive' topics that cause public outrage. It is the negative stories that have the potential to cause what among sociologists is labelled "moral panic".

THE NEGATIVE STORIES

The most negative topic on poverty is probably the abuse of benefits and services. This abuse can take various forms. A frequent story about the British media-poor deals directly with fraud. These stories are typically based on a preliminary charge or court conviction of persons that have cheated on welfare benefits. For the UK, I found many such stories (10 percent). For Sweden, I only found one in the sample. For Denmark, I did not find a single story. Another frequent British story is single mothers abusing the welfare system. This abuse is typically not illegal, but the stories clearly suggest that these single mothers have made a living out of producing children to be supported by the welfare state. Thus, the black American "welfare queen" is found in a "white" version in the UK. Together stories about benefits abuse made up 19 percent of the British stories about the media-poor. In contrast, these abuse-stories only made up 2 percent of the Danish stories and 1 percent of the Swedish stories. There are number of other negative

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stories. In total, 43 percent of the British stories were "negative", compared to 27 percent in Sweden and 26 percent in Denmark. What kept the Swedish and Danish mass media somewhat negative were stories about and pictures of immigrants living in deprived areas.

THE "HARSH" BRITISH VERSUS THE "SOFT" SWEDISH AND DANISH TABLOID PRESS

Negative stories are more sensational than positive stories. Therefore, I expected the tabloid press across all four countries to publish more negative stories. This turned out to be the case in the UK: when the British tabloid press brought out a poverty-story, the main topic was "negative" in 56 percent of the cases. 40 percent had a "positive" main topic, and four percent were in the "other" category. In contrast, 39 percent of the stories in the British broadsheet press had a "negative" main topic, 41 percent had a "positive" main topic and 20 percent belonged to the "other" category. It is even clearer when it comes to crime stories. This relationship, however, cannot be found in Sweden and Denmark. The expected pattern did not emerge even though we specifically looked for abuse and crime stories. The two Swedish tabloid newspapers did not bring out a single story on abuse or crime in the sample period. The two Danish tabloid newspapers feature four such stories. The typical Swedish and Danish tabloid poverty-story is actually "positive". The "moral panic" in the Swedish and Danish tabloid press is that of fellow citizens not being properly helped. This is a remarkable difference between the British and the Swedish and Danish tabloid press, which have their readership primarily among lower social classes. It also helps to explain the large difference in opinion towards poor and welfare recipients in the different countries.

THE PROBLEMATIC ORIGIN OF STEREOTYPES

That harsh media content is present in the UK and absent in Sweden and Denmark indicates, in my opinion, that differences in level of poverty and universalism within the welfare system influence the amount of negative newsworthy stories about "the poor". However, this is not to say that issues of ethnicity are of no importance. The data material also documents that the American tendency to depict non-whites in negative stories and whites in positive stories is present in the UK as well as in Sweden and Denmark. My point is simply that it is not all about race. Finally, one should acknowledge that is not easy to find the exact origin of stereotypes. They are produced and reproduced in a complex interaction between mass culture, mass media and politics. However, among researchers studying public opinion there is little doubt that these stereotypes, when established, are highly significant in influencing mass opinion. Therefore they are also highly significant for policy makers trying to get re-elected.

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Figure 1: Share of "positive", "negative" and "other" stories about poor and welfare recipients in five major British, Swedish and Danish newspapers between 2004 and 2009
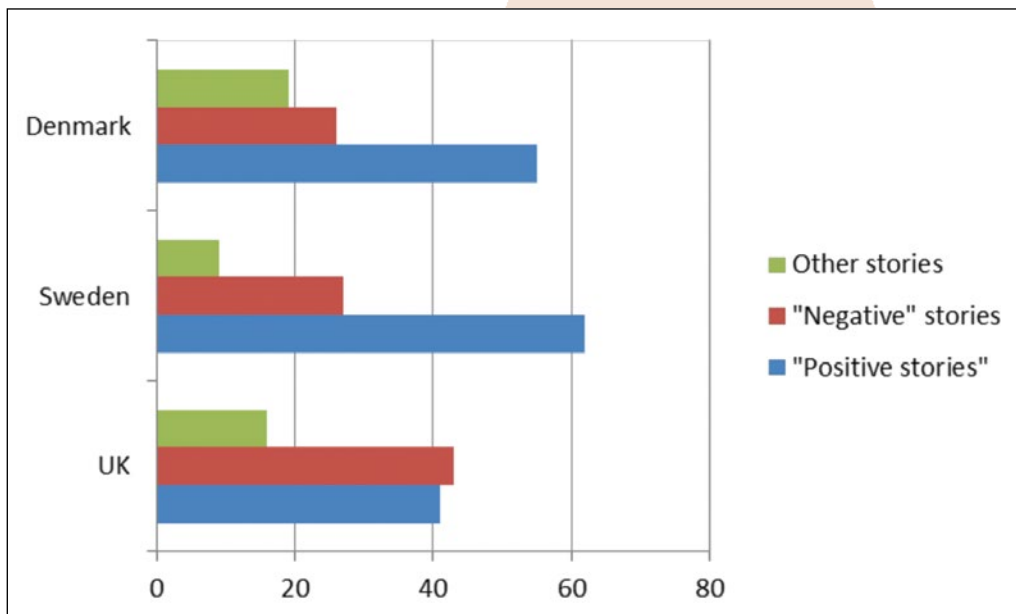
Source: *The Rise and Fall of Social Cohesion, Oxford University Press 2013*

Communicating Homelessness: The EAPN Way

By **Rosa Quesada**,[1] **Jonás Candalija**,[2] **Beatriz Iraeta**,[3] *EAPN-ES, Spain*

Language has the power to create reality. Through it the world is built, and events are classified and valued, becoming a primary tool in establishing human relationships.[4] Language is a key social agent that influences the construction of culture,[5] allowing us to establish what is good and right and what is wrong and unfair. Starting with this idea is useful, because we used it to analyse the statements made by a lawyer, Angel Pelluz, in which he said homeless people "... are not human persons" and "... are cancers on society". These remarks were made during the trial of five people accused of attacking Rafael S., a homeless person who, as a result of the attack, suffered a head injury and a hemorrhage that left him in a coma. The consequences continue today: as a result of the blows he suffers from a limiting cognitive impairment. These events took place on August 29, 2009 in Madrid, in the Moncloa district.

Knowing the basic facts of what happened; we can see that the statements made by Pelluz make a clear distinction between "us" and "them",[6] between right and wrong, between good and evil. This starts to create antagonistic groups where to be in or out of the group makes a difference.

Authors such as Alfred Schutz[7] showed that a greater distance from the facts makes for greater typifying in our knowledge and in our reaction. That is, we see that mental (empathy) and physical proximity play a key role within this system because mental proximity decreases and vanishes when we increase physical distance. This is particularly relevant in the current case, as we see how we are facing people whose physical distance from onlookers increases the mental distance from them.

Discussing the thin line between belonging to one group or the other, between being "us" and "them" is really important. Knowing the causes that make a person live on the street is important for breaking the apathy barrier. In 2005, María del Rosario Endrinal Petit was burnt to death inside a bank at the hands of a group of young people. The story has many similarities with the case of Rafael. Knowing stories like the ones of Rafael or Rosario as well as many others, should be an incentive to overcome the wall created by a lack of solidarity and reduce the mental and physical distance that we explained above.

Max Weber argued that knowing the meaning that the individual gives to their actions is the path to the meaning of social relations. In this sense, we must ask what significance both the people on trial for the attack and their lawyer attributed to the homeless. Thus we see that with expressions like "... are not human persons", "... are cancers on society" Pelluz is objectifying homeless people, turning people into things. This objectification leads to disrespectful treatment towards them, not in accordance with the dignity they deserve. If we analyse this behavior, we see that the objectification of a person also leads to that person's dehumanisation.

Dehumanisation is a process by which a person comes to perceive the other as "non-human". Erik Erikson use it to define what he called as "pseudospeciation"[8] in which what happened was: "People lose the sense of being one species and try to transform others into a deadly and dangerous species, one that doesn't count, which is non-human (...) that can be killed without feeling like you have killed one of your own kind." Therefore, the lives of the "dehumanised", in this case, homeless people, are not valued, being the target of exploitation, deprivation and violence. In this light, both the accused and his lawyer think that these acts are normal, unavoidable, justified and deserved.

Dehumanisation can occur through linguistic or physical means. In our case, we see that both have been used. The accused used the physical one, while the barrister defending him based his in linguistics. The latter is particularly significant in expressions like "... are cancers on society (...) should be removed": here, we see how the victim is redefined and objectified, placing him as someone who deserved such aggression.

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4 http://interasimbolico.blogspot.com.es/
5 We understand culture as an ensemble of knowledge, beliefs and values that are spread mostly by language
6 To think about this idea, we recommend reading the article "Pensando Sociológicamente" by Bauman http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/701/70100717.pdf
7 M, Nuñez. An Approximation from the Point of View of Alfred Schütz's Phenomenological Sociology to the Transformations of the Experience of Alterity in Contemporary Societies. Sociológica (Méx.) vol.27 no.75 México ene./abr. 2012 http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?pid=S0187-01732012000100002&script=sci_arttext
8 "La Deshumanización" written by Núñez, University of Pittsburgh, Sociology Department http://red.pucp.edu.pe/wp-content/uploads/biblioteca/101110.pdf

For these reasons, we see how, despite the proximity of homeless people to housed persons, they are an unknown group, and this same lack of knowledge perpetuates the stigma and prejudice. In this sense, the media has an important role in shaping public opinion. Their role should not be to give a "sweetened" image of one of the most serious and forgotten problems in our society; neither should homeless people receive discriminatory treatment different from the rest of the population. And it is unacceptable for public figures and mass media to deliver news about people suffering exclusion using terms like those used by the lawyer Pelluz, as this only serves to increase stigma and negative images of these groups. Finally, we see how these practices only serve to encourage the emergence of "us" and "them."

In order to do our bit towards eradicating such practices, for a better coexistence and the pursuit of greater social solidarity, here at EAPN we have developed a style guide entitled "Look at the homeless".[9] The objective is to help journalists to provide quality information on homelessness.

This guide contains the keys to understanding the situation in Spain, and relevant information for improving our knowledge of the situation. There is also a section dedicated to the use of appropriate terms. This last point is particularly important if we consider the target audience for this guide, they are mainly journalists, who are discourse generators. Accordingly, the use of terms such as "homeless" as opposed to widespread concepts as "indigent", "needy", "beggar", "tramp" or "drifter" is recommended because these latter terms are used as synonyms for the first, but have a different (negative) connotation. It is also important, when developing information concerning homeless people, to use them as a primary source of information, that is, asking their opinion on events. The guide also addresses the importance of images featured by the media which are usually very biased and stereotypical images of the life of these people.

Despite the proximity of homeless people to housed persons, they are an unknown group, and this same lack of knowledge perpetuates the stigma and prejudice.

9   The guide can be found at: http://www.eapn.es/ARCHIVO/documentos/recursos/2/1081_ficheros_documentos_Guia_PSH_EAPN_Madrid.pdf

Representing Homeless People in the Popular Media – Some Hints from The City is for All

By **The City is for All**,[1] *Hungary*

> "Homeless spokespeople tend to be asked personal questions, but very few regarding issues of policy or politics."

The representation of homeless people in the Hungarian media is often based on harmful stereotypes, which not only stigmatise homeless people, but also destroy the common sense of solidarity in our society. In the following article, we will present the main problems that homeless members of The City is for All, a homeless-led advocacy group in Budapest, and their allies have identified. In the second part of the article, we will offer suggestions for potential solutions as well. This text is based on the English translation of a leaflet that our group has distributed to thousands of press workers and media organisations over the past few years.

THE PROBLEM: SUPERFICIAL, STEREOTYPICAL AND HARMFUL REPRESENTATION

The most widespread problem is that media workers – following general public discourse – **use the word "homeless" as a noun** to refer to people who have no home. When homeless people are referred to as "the homeless," we are reduced to our current condition – a condition that we are striving to change as soon as possible. With this linguistic practice, homelessness becomes our single most important characteristic, disregarding the fact that we are also – and more importantly – men, women, activists, shop assistants, cooks, etc.

> "More and more people are interested in the work of our group, and we get a lot of inquiries from the press."

A more serious case of this problem is when we are called some **pejorative and offensive terms.** We are not only called "the homeless," but we also hear words like "hobo" or "bum." The majority of us find such language deeply offensive to our dignity.

An even more extreme example of this is when **animal metaphors** are used to refer to homeless people, as this example from a weekly paper illustrates: "the homeless have proliferated in the neighbourhood." We are human beings with the same dignity and consciousness as all other people and we find such metaphors highly offensive.

A problem closely related to this one is when **the homelessness of a person is stated even if it has nothing to do with the reported action or event**: "An altercation broke out among some homeless men when one of them attempted to take the girlfriend of the other." Such texts present homelessness as the single most important characteristic of these people, as it if was something to be emphasised. In reality, homelessness is used to "spice up" the report as an altercation between two housed ("regular") men may not even make it into the news.

This practice can be particularly dangerous when **the homelessness of a criminal offender is emphasised** ("the boy was chased by two homeless men with a knife" or "the homeless gang killed two members of the family"). These reports create the impression that homeless people are inherently more prone to commiting crimes (which is not true) and stigmatise everyone who does not have a proper home.

It is also highly harmful when **homeless people are cited as negative examples of certain phenomena**. "For years he looked as if he were homeless. He has been unable to get himself a proper suit to this day." In these statements, common stereotypes are reinforced. Sentences like these create the impression that we are essentially uniform and that this uniformity takes shape in something negative. The reality is quite the contrary! Homeless people are highly diverse, with unique family backgrounds and personal traits unique to each and every one of us.

A related problem is that **homelessness is often identified with begging and living on the street.** "Suddenly a homeless-looking person came up to me asking if I have some spare change." This is a strong distortion of the facts: only about one in every ten homeless people in Hungary engages in begging and the vast majority of us never do. In addition, around 15% of all homeless people in Budapest live in public spaces, while 79% live in shelters and 6% use some other housing solutions. In other words, even if the people who live in public spaces are the most visible (and also often the most vulnerable), homeless people are not a homogeneous group and by treating us so, the media strongly distorts reality.

The images, footage and quotes that go with media reports make the problem even worse. Whenever the topic of homelessness is addressed, **the illustrations almost exclusively show middle-aged, bearded, mostly inebriated men wearing dirty clothes**. This visual representation significantly contributes to the reinforcement of the stereotypes. Undoubtedly, there are people among us who are may be close to this stereotype, but there are also a great many of us who do not look like this at all. To convey an authentic image, the media should stop using such a simplistic, generalising and reductionist representation of people who do not have a proper home.

The media often **uses the image of homelessness to illustrate certain negative social phenomena**. For example, when the text refers to urinating/defecating or drinking in public, the illustration is often that of a homeless person. Obviously, not all homeless people will engage in such activities and many people who have homes will.

> "When journalists get to know a homeless activist directly, they immediately start sympathising with our goals."

> "Many media workers don't know anything about homelessness. They are often hostile at the beginning, but when we give them a lot of information, they start to cooperate really well."

Very often homeless people are **represented as helpless victims in need of protection**. While appreciating the goodwill behind such an approach, we do not endorse it for two reasons. First, such a representation disregards and conceals the strengths and capacities of homeless people, depriving us of our identity as active citizens. Second, it places an unduly large emphasis on the significance of external help, often glorifying the assistance offered by the social services rather than providing a more sophisticated and critical portrayal of the situation. What homeless people need most of all is not charity and individual protection, but access to safe and dignified housing. This aspect of homelessness, however, is often muted in most media reports.

Another, equally problematic approach is when **homelessness is overly romanticised**, that is when homelessness is portrayed as a lifestyle choice that brings a carefree life and freedom. This approach may be productive in changing public awareness, but it often lacks the depiction of the suffering and deprivation that goes along with our daily survival as homeless people.

Representations of homeless people in the media tend to **focus almost exclusively on the personality and life story** of the person in question. There are hardly any reports on the systemic problems that maintain and reproduce homelessness on a mass scale. In other words, there is too much focus on the consequences of losing one's home, while hardly any mention is made of the underlying reasons and problems at the social level.

> "Some journalists have commented on how 'fluently' and 'sophisticatedly' I can speak, as if this were a surprise."

THE SOLUTION: SENSITIVE, MULTIFACETED AND RESPONSIBLE REPRESENTATION

The list above may make us look very hard to please, but this is not the case. We would like to offer the following suggestions to media workers to help them create a more accurate and authentic representation of homelessness.

- Refrain from using "a homeless" to mean "a homeless person" as well as from such pejorative terms as "bum" or "hobo." When using the word "homeless," always use it as an adjective together with a noun like "person" or "activist," which contributes to the image of a unique person rather than the anonymous member of a group.
- When choosing illustrations, stay away from entrenched stereotypes such as a faceless man lying on the street covered by dirty clothes. Make an effort to convey the diversity of our lives and experiences in your choice of images.
- Avoid emphasising the fact someone is homelessness if this fact has no relevance to the story being told.
- It is important that the topic of homelessness remains on the agenda of the media even after winter is over. Homelessness is not a seasonal problem, but something that causes suffering to a lot of people all year round. As a result, it should be addressed in all seasons regardless of the external temperature.
- Present both the personal stories of homeless people and the underlying structural and social reasons behind why people have to be without a home.
- Report on potential solutions and best practices. The solution to the problem of homelessness is not the distribution of hot tea and slices of bread but inclusive social and economic policies and the provision of proper housing for all. These suggestions should make their way into the mainstream media as well.
- Ask questions about the responsibility of the state in preventing and producing homelessness. This is essential for an authentic and detailed representation of the issue.
- While it is important that the positive aspects of homeless people's lives are presented, do not forget about presenting the daily suffering and humiliation that homeless people face.
- Homelessness should not be presented as the problem of homeless people but as an issue that concerns all of us regardless of our housing situation.

> "There are some documentaries that aim to present a very realistic picture of homelessness, which also does justice to the experiences of homeless people."

"Be As Cool as the Homeless." Why Do Polish Homeless People Advertise Beanies?[1] New Trends in Stigmatising Homeless People

By **Anna Kwaśnik**[2] and **Łukasz Browarczyk**,[3] *Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting Out of Homelessness, Poland*

Can the street homeless - seen, as they are, as 'dirty and unkempt', become a fashion icon? Well, yes, it seems, they can. The Polish fashion world has recently been rocked by a unique advertising campaign made by Lodz clothing brand "Żulerka" (the name can be translated as "Bum") that used homeless people as models. The homeless people are shown wearing hats with the inscription "Żulerka" or "Be Real" on them. Public opinion is divided about the campaign. Most feel the idea is distasteful, but some say that it is original, funny and even pro-social.

The idea is new to Polish soil but the world has already known the term "homeless chic" for a few years. In 2009, the cover of the Italian "Vogue" magazine featured models dressed to look like "homeless" people. A year later, fashion designer Vivienne Westwood's catwalk models wore dirty clothes and pushed supermarket trolleys filled with junk. A few years earlier, another fashion designer, John Galliano, explained that he had taken his inspiration from the "street people" he had begun noticing along the banks of the Seine in Paris. His collection for fashion house Dior was made from specially-designed silk imitating printed newspapers and other luxurious fabrics that had been specially torn so that they looked dirty and worn. Galliano added: "Some of these people are like impresarios, their coats worn over their shoulders and their hats worn at a certain angle. It's fantastic".[4] American columnist Maureen Dowd responded to these words saying, "Not so fantastic, with subzero temperatures along the East Coast, for those lining their own authentically threadbare clothing with real newspaper. Cold never feels chic."[5]

A German designer, Patrick Mohr, went a step further when he presented his clothes on the catwalk using real homeless people as models. In China, a homeless man photographed on the street has become very popular on the Internet and he was hailed as a style icon. He was wearing a long faux-leather jacket, colorful fabric as a belt and Ugg-style boots.[6] With his long unkempt hair, a straggly beard and prominent cheekbones, Mr Cheng was dubbed "China's sexiest tramp" and "Brother Sharp" when the images of him were posted online.[7] There is also a blog tracking the best dressed, most stylish homeless people from Tokyo and Los Angeles (www.homelesschic.com). The blog's authors explain that "the purpose of this site is to catalogue images of people living on the street who exhibit a unique sense of personal style. (...) These are the real do-it-yourself risk-takers, experts in the art of found objects and that prove once again that true style comes from within."[8]

Another, relatively new trend in "homeless fashion" is taking "selfies" (pictures of oneself) with homeless people and sharing them on social networking sites.[9] Homeless people in these pictures are a kind of attraction, like the Eiffel Tower or a celebrity.

What does it mean if the height of fashion is inspired by homeless people? The trend is not associated with any social campaign, does not raise awareness of the serious nature of this problem and its causes and nor does it invite viewers to help those people. Glamorising society's poorest members gives the impression that their life isn't so bad. Showing

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1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knit_cap
2 a.kwasnik@pfwb.org.pl
3 lukasz.browarczyk@pfwb.org.pl
4 C. D. McDonald, *Homeless Fashion – What A Load Of Rubbish*, http://www.menstylefashion.com/homeless-fashion-what-a-load-of-rubbish, 10.03.2014.
5 M, Dowd, Liberties; Haute Homeless, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/23/opinion/liberties-haute-homeless.html, 12.03.2014.
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8 *Homeless Chic*, www.homelesschic.com, 10.03.2014.

homelessness under the cover of luxury gets away from the real issue, which is lost in the new context. Showing a picture of a homeless person on a blog detaches him/her from the situation s/he is in, from the hunger, cold, depression, etc s/he may be feeling. Homelessness transplanted into the world of fashion, beautiful people and great bodies, leads to the trivialisation of the problem. Some sociologists recognise that fashion's interest in homelessness is a way of trying to soothe the guilt felt by representatives of the rich. This trend gives a false idea that they are interested in the poorest and most socially excluded, even beyond just recognising the beauty in them. They magnanimously restore a sense of humanity to homeless people through their aestheticisation. Moreover, young, beautiful and well-fed people can dress like "bums" because they have a choice. They can nonchalantly walk about in torn clothes but don't have to walk endlessly, don't look for food in garbage cans and can have a shower easily; they are clean. So dressing up in the style of homeless people is actually a clear form of demonstrating one's difference from them, of underscoring the chasm which divides the two groups.

The practise of showing poverty against a glamourous backdrop is hard to form clear-cut opinions about. From the perspective of professional helpers, who are interested in combating homelessness through respect for humanitarian values, using the image of people sleeping rough for commercial purposes is blameworthy. It resembles a form of entertainment for people who are bored with their rich life as, in order to create some variety, they play at outwardly experiencing the poverty and destitution people who are sleeping rough experience.

However, the matter of using images of homelessness requires a closer look. It is known that homelessness is usually absent from the media or, if it appears, the image given is negative – people sleeping rough are shown as repulsive deviants who do not observe the life principles set down by society and therefore contaminate public space. They are presented as blots on the city landscape. At the same time, homeless people are considered to be responsible for their own condition. On the other hand, the "homeless chic" trend is a new way of presenting homelessness. It is worth noting the comments under articles concerning the use of the image of homeless people for commercial purposes. A look at user comments under articles that talk about the use of the homeless for commercial advertising campaigns shows an ambiguous assessment of this practice. There are entries criticising the objectification of the people whose image is used: "making money out of human misery: a sick, starving man without the opportunity to change in a purple, cheerful cap... shameful"; "a "bum" is certainly a lot cheaper than a model – you just have to pay for one cap ;-)" [10]. On the other hand, there are positive remarks about such practices: "In my opinion the idea is great. These people have a chance to earn some money, other than begging, they have their caps and their minute of fame. Who knows, maybe a person will be recognised by his family? Maybe their life will change? I hope so with all my heart" and "A round of applause for the brave company that saw people in all of us!" [11] It needs to be determined which of the ideas described actually treats the homeless without stigma.

In our opinion, the use of images of homeless people for commercial purposes is objectifying and stigmatising. This is independent of whether the occasional models are offered a reward for agreeing to have their picture taken or not. This is because the essence of amusement using the image of poverty, exclusion or homelessness is a detachment from real life. In such practices, the misery of homeless people's existence is ignored. In photography, involving homeless people amounts to a commercial activity based solely on aesthetic issues. This is a result of the fascination of the middle and upper classes with picturesque poverty. This fascination negates humanity, and homelessness boils down to having an intriguing and remarkable appearance. The difficult existence of people sleeping rough is negated and lends itself to the aesthetic purpose. It follows that the new "homeless chic" trend that is increasingly appearing in Poland is a new form of objectification which deepens their exclusion. Only this time, rejection and negation is reduced to a fun personality trait, beyond which nobody perceives the existence of excluded people.

The matter of using images of homelessness requires a closer look.

9   A. Greig, *Latest sick selfie trend sees teens posing for photos with homeless people*, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2556424/Latest-sick-selfie-trend-sees-teens-posing-photos-homeless-people.html, 10.03.2014.

10 I. Adamczewska, *'Żule' twarzami łódzkiej marki. Reklamują czapki*, http://lodz.gazeta.pl/lodz/51,35153,15409713.html?i=1, 10.03.2014.

11 A. Parzyszek, *Kontrowersyjna kampania łódzkiej marki. Jej czapki reklamują bezdomni*, http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/lodz/kontrowersyjna-kampania-lodzkiej-marki-jej-czapki-reklamuja-bezdomni/2zgg3, 10.03.2014.

It seems to us that it is much easier to work on the image of homelessness resulting from the fascination with the visual rather than trying to transform traditional negative stereotypes of homelessness.

What is more, this practice can be a way of "taming" exclusion as a "necessary" component of the social order. If this is the case, it deserves more attention and an appropriate response from the professionals.

Paradoxically, the morally questionable practice of using images of homelessness or poverty does not have a negative impact on solving this problem. It seems to us that it is much easier to work on the image of homelessness resulting from the fascination with the visual rather than trying to transform traditional negative stereotypes of homelessness. In the traditional stereotype, the image is linked to the biography of a person; there are clearly attributed intentions and assigned responsibilities. The mechanism boils down to considering that homeless people are homeless because they are suffering the consequences of bad decisions, so it is their own fault. Such an image of homelessness in the public conscience is devastating for homeless people themselves, as well as for the chances of solving this problem. By contrast, the "homeless chic" image of homelessness, separated from the person's biography, generally seems to make it relatively easy to fill the gap with content closer to reality, that does not stigmatise them and is free from negative stereotypes. It seems to us, following the cursory analysis of the comments under articles speaking about "homeless chic", that the practice is interpreted by commentators as objectifying homeless people. This is different from the traditional, stereo-typical image of homeless people which does cause widespread uproar. Therefore, it seems that in the process of humanisation of the image of homelessness it is worth working on an image devoid of content, rather than one with anti-humanitarian content.

In conclusion, in Poland there is a new trend of presenting homelessness, which we have provision-ally entitled "homeless chic". It comes down to the use of the image of homeless people for commercial purposes, such as fashion advertising. It separates the image from the context of poverty and exclusion. In our opinion, this is a new form of objectification and stigmatisation, but at the same time there is potential in this method. It could be used in projects aimed at solving the problem of homelessness. In our opinion "homeless chic", as opposed to negative stereotypical images, is devoid of content related to the life of the homeless person depicted. This allows for a relatively easy adaptation of the presentation to the needs of public campaigns aimed at the humanisation of the homeless, in order to show that the lack of a house is a dramatic problem and that solving it is a necessity in every civilized country that respects human rights.

Raising Awareness About Homelessness: *Fondation Abbé Pierre's* Tweet2rue and Poster Campaigns

By **Marc Uhry**, *Fondation Abbé Pierre, France*

Figures on homelessness are well known. 3.5 million people are suffering from housing exclusion in France and 140,000 people sleep rough. It is of course important to measure the phenomenon, but that doesn't explain what life is like on the streets, how cold and how dangerous it is, but also how the people it affects belong to the same humanity as everyone else. To compensate for this, and to avoid always being the arbitrary mouthpiece for homeless people, in 2013 *Fondation Abbé Pierre* set up « Tweet2rue » ("StreetTweets"), a way to allow people living on the streets to express themselves, in partnership with the French national public broadcasting service, *France Inter*. We gave smartphones to individuals who usually come to our day centres and who wanted to share their experiences and views on Twitter. Each of the candidates was paired up with a well-known radio journalist who agreed to retweet everything the candidates posted. The broadcasting service also agreed to promote the initiative and hundreds of mass media and internet tools backed it and sometimes revisited the story to give news from the people involved.

It was an excellent way to give the people involved more opportunity for "self-expression" and to motivate other individuals in the same situation to take the floor as well. The experts and stakeholders had to become a bit humble and the big data had to deal with subjective expression from people. But it was also an unexpected way to connect homeless and housed citizens, leading to relationships and sometimes even accommodation solutions. A kind of a goodwill community is progressively appearing on the internet, which is having an effect on the real world too. To give you an idea: the participants in "Tweet2rue" currently have between 800 and 3,000 followers. Some of them have given up, some have moved on, some have been housed and, little by little, other individuals are starting on the Tweet2rue journey. Thanks to the project, homeless people are now more than just bodies occupying part of public space; they are citizens participating in the public sphere.

"12m2 is normal for a billboard. What about for a family?"

We try to insist on dignity and universality in our campaigns.

"7m² is the size of a parking space. For thousands of people, it's the size of their home."

As a charity, *Fondation Abbe Pierre* receives only private funding, coming from ordinary people (about 400,000 persons each year). Half of the donations are given in December: the first low temperatures and "Christmas spirit" stimulate sensitivity to homelessness, making it the perfect time to raise awareness. This is why, each December, we launch a large-scale poster campaign combined with a video clip. We try to insist on dignity and universality in our campaigns. The simple, long-term message is "you don't need to feel guilt or pathos, just remember that we are all the human and we can't let some of us freeze to death". We have partnerships with bus companies, advertisement companies, TV channels and others, which gives us free advertising space. We recently received an award for one of our campaigns, against micro-homes. On 12m2 placards, parking spaces (6m2) and bus stops (7m2), we put posters of a micro-flat from above, saying things like "enough space for a bus stop, but not to live in". Our latest campaign showed homeless people with part of their bodies replaced by pictures from their past, accompanied by the slogan "they had a past, let's help them have a future", to stress there are no outsiders, homeless people are not the 'Other', they are people like us.

"They had a past. Let's help them have a future".

"The problem with slums isn't just that people live there. It's that they die there too."

Uncomfortable Little Stones in Their Shoes

By **Henrique Pinto**,[1] *CAIS Association, Portugal*

"We cannot be the exception and them the rule."

(Martin Schulz, 20th June 2013, CAIS Headquarters, Lisbon)

The real mission of those working in the social sector is not to cover up the asymmetries caused by local or central government but **to speak up** and **bring about the change** demanded by the continuous playing out of the fight for JUSTICE.

Indeed it is the **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, the idea of human dignity, stemming from the experience of a common and interdependent *gratuity*, *vulnerability* and "*progettualità*" (Gianni Vattimo),[2] that provides the basis of one's feeling of responsibility for the other. Justice has nothing to do with one's goodness or generosity, or with a government's distribution of a surplus of money or other resources.

The **right to belong** to the earth is the very *first right*, what makes *inclusion* i.e., the right to be part of basic goods and services, one of the greatest challenges of all time. As a "call" pushing the best laws beyond their limits, in an endless affirmation of Derridean Justice, CAIS Association, in Portugal, has been standing up for that sort of inclusion, which a vulgar and current *bourgeoisie solidarity* has been incapable of proposing and providing while responding to the actual economic and financial crisis - because it is a strategy resulting from a outmoded and failed economy.

The idea that poverty is much needed so that others may grow in generosity and be kind to the poor, or that it must be institutionalised, so that thousands of people may keep their jobs in the social sector, are theoretically unacceptable. But their practice is still today a cruel and scandalous reality.

In this brief article, we dare to present the **passion** or the driving force behind a tireless dedication to the eradication of poverty and homelessness, which was also meant to be the announcement of CAIS' own death.

At the beginning of the third millennium, we took a document we named **CAIS' first social political statement** to the Portuguese Parliament. We were received by the Portuguese President, and on his initiative, a commission was created, made up of several MPs, representing each political party, whose task was to work regularly with us and other organisations willing to join the group. Several meetings and a seminar on Poverty and Social Exclusion were organised.

The conversation was never an easy exercise. Portuguese politicians, after 40 years of democracy, do not really know how to dialogue with civil society, and often they think that whenever they sit together with it, they are doing us a big favour. Unfortunately, a few months ago, with the fall of the government and the dissolution of the Parliament, our group also lost legitimacy. We have been trying to get it back but without success. Although the country has become much poorer and the general impoverishment of the population is debated in many parliamentary sessions, to deal with the issue through an engaged dialogue with the civil society seems either to be a luxury or a total waste of time.

In 2003, precisely on the **17th of October**, *World Day for the Eradication of Poverty*, we invited organisations supporting the homeless in Lisbon to gather around a replica of the slab placed in the Trocadero Plaza (Paris), to signal the 1987 gathering of over 100,000 people demanding the end of poverty. The three most popular Portuguese TV channels also accepted the invitation and covered the event, and the impact was so great that from that time onwards, a day that was an almost marginal, ephemeral moment in Portugal, started gaining growing importance, having today become an occasion to meet, reflect and put forward solutions aiming at the eradication or alleviation of poverty.

Working closely with the **Media** has helped us to reveal concrete violations of fundamental rights and what causes them or the poor political governance behind them. There has never been a CAIS event that has not been covered by the Media, which means that CAIS has always been out there making the public aware of the problems, while mobilizing and challenging them to embrace a radical change of mind and heart, leaving behind unsustainable lifestyles.

Years ago, with the aim of recovering the **political power** every **social actor** has**,** CAIS Association pushed all social organisations and their paid and voluntary staff beyond the limits of a practice so constrained by having to find emergency situations and where the time to think and reflect upon public policies is almost non-existent. Even today, people studying social work leave university without being aware that their main task is not to become service-providers, but *guardians*, *promoters* of fundamental,

> Working closely with the Media has helped us to reveal concrete violations of fundamental rights and what causes them.

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2   http://www.iep.utm.edu/vattimo/

basic rights, such as a the right to housing and work, by preventing the emergence of social problems, by denouncing them and by helping to solve them. But then, when they start working for a particular organization, the defence of the powerless and voiceless does not get any easier. Difficulties arise and impose themselves on practices, some stemming from administrations for whom target groups are simply outputs and never crucial interlocutors of a daily management, and others stemming from fear of losing the State's support.

It might be a world problem, known everywhere, but in Portugal people tend to be luckier than others when they speak well of those in power. In the Media, we repeatedly hear people saying that the Portuguese people are much more supportive of others, readier to help than in the past. But as the adult population were not **educated about cooperation** in their youth, the same is also true of those who are quite young today. In times of crisis, *being there for others* runs the risk of being mere decoration if it does not become the real core, the foundation, the DNA of one's basic and on-going formation.

Through a few annual initiatives, CAIS has become more and more **outspoken**, a well-respected organisation, having been invited to publicly contribute, address and comment on social issues regarding poverty and homelessness many times.

Although far from overcoming their precariousness and acquiring a more definite sustainability, some **job-solutions**, created precisely to counterbalance the galloping increase of the unemployment rate, CAIS won, in 2012, the second position of the European Economic and Social Committee Civil Society Prize. The news spreading within the European Institutions brought the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz to the CAIS headquarters in Lisbon twice,. It was Mr Schulz himself who expressed his wish to come and listen to homeless people.

Lately it was the President of the European Commission who decided to donate part of the Carlos V Award attributed to him to CAIS, and his official visit to CAIS is also being arranged and intended to take place before he leaves office.

Together with other formal meetings organised with European Members of Parliament, where the homeless themselves take an active part, the proximity we have been cultivating with **politicians** and **decision makers** not only serves to keep them better informed about a reality that is quite foreign to them (not long ago, a very prominent Portuguese politician asked me whether homeless women also had children), but also under continuous pressure, so they are obliged to address very delicate matters. And when they do, it is not quite the case that they have become convinced that homeless people ought to receive different treatment than they do now, but because we have become uncomfortable little stones in their shoes.

We all know that changes do not occur by decree, but we are also quite convinced that when individual or collective will is not there and a general apathy and tolerance towards poverty and homelessness are the reigning attitudes, the transformation of social policies or the creation of new ones are an important way forward to demolish social imbalances and promote a better distribution of wealth. In the construction of Justice, the **law has to be a good ally,** favouring the eradication of poverty.

To take people off the streets, to support those who really long for it, are not easy tasks. They demand continuous work with and for them and the construction of a life-project where they are the true actors, the leaders of their own way out into something that they have really envisaged for themselves, without it being imposed on them. Quite a good number of organisations do try to do their best, with the resources they have, to accomplish the dreams of so many homeless people, but without the State's commitment, this effort becomes a very long way to a different home. **A National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People** has been totally ignored by those in power, and programmes such as *housing first*, and the strong accent on the need to invest on the *social economy* and the construction of *social houses*, so clearly stated in the National Reform Plan, have been abandoned and hundreds of homeless people have been left to the mercy of soup kitchens, staying in shelters and residential bedrooms with neither dignity nor future.

The cover image was produced by an artist participating in ARTfitzrovia, a community project that provides a safe place for homeless and vulnerably housed people to meet and develop their art http://artfitzrovia.org/

The artist walks across Europe each summer and paints postcards which he sends to people he has met over the years. This piece is loosely based on his illustrations, which are linked to original illustrations by Hans Holbein in the margins of Erasmus's book 'In Praise of Folly'. The design is completed with lines of doggerel, which the artist has written around the margins.

European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, AISBL

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