

THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS FROM TIMISOARA REGARDING THE PHENOMENON OF HOMELESS ADULTS

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Abstract:

A social phenomenon affecting a vulnerable segment of the population, the absence of shelter is a daily reality. Often marginalized, those deprived of shelter struggle with a predominantly negative perception. Future actors on the labor market or entrepreneurs, Timișoara students can actively contribute to the social integration of vulnerable groups.

Keywords:

Homeless people, social reintegration, perception

Theoretical considerations on the phenomenon of homeless adults

Directly correlated with poverty and weakening family ties, the rise in homelessness is a certainty of the present. Extreme manifestation of poverty in the urban area (Paraschiv 2016, p115), homelessness is still insufficiently studied in Romania.

The social inclusion of vulnerable groups is a desideratum in a modern Romania, placed in a European context. At European level, the concept of social inclusion has been relatively recent, being a framework for social policy making and evaluation in the 1990s (Zamfir, Stanescu, Briciu, 2016, p. 43). The European Council in Nice (2000) set priorities for labor market participation, access for all to resources, rights, goods and services, prevention of the risk of social exclusion correlated with concrete actions for the most vulnerable groups.

The term of social exclusion has begun to be used frequently since the 1980s. Authorities, both at European and governmental level, are involved in the development of anti-exclusion policies.

In this perspective, the problem of homelessness must also be perceived in terms of the responsibilities that Romania has, in a European context, towards its own citizens, and the Member States have the obligation to include the priority themes in the National Anti Poverty Plans.

Regarding the Romanian authors, it is considered in the literature that "social inclusion improves the psychic handicap by improving self-esteem through the socio-professional role" (Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016, pag. 45) which in case of professional reintegration of homeless adults appears as an essential condition, both in terms of mental state and economic considerations.

The social amplitude of the phenomenon differs from urban to rural, from urban to urban, even. Frequently, large cities attract people looking for opportunities. Most often, the illusion of an El Dorado collapses in the face of reality. Major cities have opportunities, but they are not available unconditionally. Homeless people can hardly access opportunities. Victims of a pool of disadvantaged factors, the homeless are in a vicious circle from which they can not come out. The absence of identity documents and stable domicile, not necessarily in the legal sense but de facto, hinders professional integration. These contextual barriers are overlapping, others of a conjectural fact - the presence of a disability, the community's mentality barriers, some legal issues. Recently, the Timisoara press reported the situation of a homeless person who succeeded with the support of a benevolent person, professional reintegration, when he discovered that he had a series of unpaid contravention sanctions. Sometimes, as reported in the local press, the person was fined twice a day. Such situations can lead to major difficulties of professional reintegration and the demotivation of the person to continue the work.

Why the city mirage? Although coexistence in rural areas is marked by a strong collective humanity, (Gavrilă-Ardelean, M., Gavrilă-Ardelean, L., 2014, pag.3) major cities in Romania are perceived as poles of regional development and economic growth. Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Constanta are large cities favored by geographical location and attract citizens looking for economic opportunities. This trend is not new. It was obvious during the communist era that the authorities strongly encouraged a migratory flow from rural to urban, in

order to provide the necessary workforce for the industry. However, it has to be said that the living standards of the townspeople increased significantly during the interwar (Neculau, Ferreol, 1999, pag. 299) period. Benefiting from modern living conditions, utilities, transportation, cities have begun to attract. For example, in Bucharest in 1931 there was running water in houses. Homeless adults are attracted by big cities, considering that they can provide an answer to the problems they face. However, poverty is stronger in urban areas than in rural areas (Paraschiv 2016, pag.29). According to the cited source, poverty in the rural environment presents the peculiarity of the absence of food. In relation to the urban environment, poverty is generated by the legislative or administrative system, correlated with unfair rules of rights and obligations in labor relations. Although cities are the engines of the metaphorically expressed zonal economic development, these are also the environments in which resources are distributed differently, which will lead to an increase in the living standards gap between the rich and the poor. This state of affairs deeply deprives homeless people of the reintegration process. However, large cities continue to attract.

In this context, the perception of public opinion on homeless people is a factor that can make a decisive contribution to reintegration efforts or, on the contrary, may discourage them from hostile attitudes. If, in the case of categories of socially disadvantaged beneficiaries, empathy is higher or lower, in the case of homeless people relevant studies that highlight public perceptions of this category of vulnerable people have not been identified. Identity is not a social given but a construct that is as dynamic as the social space in which it manifests itself.

At Bucharest's level, the population's perception of homeless adults was highlighted for the first time in 2007: Thus, a study was carried out of 50 passers-by in the University Square (Paraschiv 2016, pag. 153). The general perception of study participants focuses on personal causes of those affected by the phenomenon - alcoholism being linked to the loss of dwelling. At the same time, the visibility of the phenomenon is highlighted as being at the average, the results of the perception survey showed that 34% of the respondents could not accurately indicate when they had seen a homeless person.

90% of respondents associate homelessness with begging and 43% with theft.

Around 40% of study participants experience insecure feelings around homeless people.

A year later, another study conducted in Bucharest shows a good perception of the 652 respondents on the causes of the phenomenon of homelessness.

The importance of such studies is particularly distinct, especially in the context of homelessness that leads to discreet living, endeavoring to survive as well as without it. In fact, the social phenomenon is relatively discreet, the "interactions" of homeless people with the general population are reduced.

Also, the extreme poverty in which these people live is, in turn, a brake on reintegration. If we relate to the European Union, Eurostat uses two definitions of poverty (Paraschiv 2016, pag.22), a relative approach, poverty as a result of an inadequate level of resources so that the population concerned can not reach a standard of living considered acceptable in relation to the scales of society in which he lives. In this context, we discuss the existence of phenomena related to poverty - unemployment, lack of income necessary to satisfy primary needs, poor living conditions, in relation to social standards. At the same time, according to the same bibliographic sources, we also discuss the absolute definition of poverty, the situation of the household where the average income is below 60% of the average household income of the respective state. Regardless of the definition used, homeless adults live below the poverty line in extreme poverty. Poverty is a global reality, but its peculiarities are related to local contexts, delimited temporally-spatially, but also geopolitical. According to some authors, poverty in Eastern Europe (Neculau, Ferreol, 1999, pag. 211) is caused by the misguided economic principles of previous political regimes, explained by the lack of knowledge and skills, during periods of transition perceived as "destructive" by the authors. In their view, poverty in Eastern Europe is perceived as a "blame", "a result of failure". It was not by accident that this model was chosen to be presented. If at macro-social level we are talking about a fault of poverty, about failure and the feeling of failure at the individual level, do we not load the poor with the same attributes? Often poverty is perceived as a guilt of the person as proof of lack of capacity and ability, of social abilities. The poor are often perceived as inefficient and incapable of success, either in terms of abilities, or this state of affairs is triggered by a vice - drinking alcohol, volatile substances of the aurolac type.

The profound transformations that have affected the Romanian society after the fall of communism led to the extreme impoverishment of certain categories of people at risk of vulnerability. Relative to other eastern European states, except for Albania, Romania presented, for example, the highest poverty rate in 1998 (Teşliuc, Pop, Teşliuc, 2001, pag. 23). A significant percentage of the population of about 40% lived with less than \$ 4 a day, while 7% lived with less than \$ 2 a day. If, at the beginning of transition, poverty was a marginal phenomenon, it gradually came to represent a major social problem in 1999, according to the authors cited.

In this context, the social phenomenon of homeless adults began to affect an extremely poor segment of the population, due to the lack of resources.

The social marginalization of homeless adults is, unfortunately, a daily reality. From those wounded in public transport, because of olfactory considerations, those in the residential access halls, where they enter the winter to warm themselves, from the personal to the social ones, the homeless are often pushed to the edge of society. Of course, we do not judge situations, we just find them. In reality, the social marginalization of the homeless is a cumulation of factors. Analyzing, as literature references provide, vulnerable factors, we will refer to "capital" (Neculau, Ferreol, 1999 pag 223). The economic capital of homeless people is reduced anyway, but also improperly allocated. Most often, homeless people do not buy goods from hypermarkets, but from small shops, often in areas where they wander. The absence of a dwelling, a warehouse or a storeroom prevents the purchase of goods in large quantities at an advantageous price. Thus, the small financial resources are inappropriately spent. The second type of capital, referring to the bibliographic source, is the health capital. Homeless adults have a much worse health status, relative to the category of citizens who have their homes. Health is aggravated by substance use, as we have shown, alcohol, volatile substances, even drugs, but also poor housing conditions and the lack of reaction to medical problems. Homeless people arrive in emergency reception units, often at the request of the ambulance or on their own initiative. Patient participation in the medical act by strictly following the doctor's instructions is deficient for homeless people. Because of the lack of material resources, most often the homeless patient does not follow the doctor's instructions. As a direct consequence, it is personal

degradation of the state of health, and at institutional level, multiple presentations in the UPU-SMURD and high social expenditures. In the context of the homeless professional's integration, possible medical conditions act as a brake or a barrier. Having a pulmonary, cardiovascular and dermatological condition from a medical perspective, the professional rehousing of the homeless adult can be problematic. In fact, in relation to professional reintegration, alcohol and drug use, are factors that prevent reintegration. Also from a medical perspective, a number of mental health problems have the same effect, jeopardize professional reintegration and cost society with the cost of these services, according to the quality standards provided for each type of service (Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2008).

Reported to social capital, to the social support network, this is most often in the case of homeless, extremely "weak". Relationships with the family of origin are often weakened, or marked by conflicting, unresolved situations. As a rule, knowledge comes from the same socio-cultural environment, people who are in a socially vulnerable situation and can not offer advice or help.

Cultural capital, summed up by hygienic habits and lifestyle habits, is also deficient in homeless adults. Hygiene and personal cleaning skills leave much to be desired for the homeless. In relation to the time period from the time of losing the home, the more the homeless person has a longer stay on the street, the more hygienic skills are depreciating. Food habits are also flawed. Meal is not served at fixed hours, sleep and rest time is reported for other hours. Gradually, important chronological milestones are lost. If the homeless uses, for example, a watch, the signs are encouraging to get out of this situation (Neculau, Ferreol, 1999, pag 224

Unfortunately, the loss of positive self-image is not an encouraging sign. However, homeless adults manage to keep their body hygiene and clean clothing. There is an indication that the possibility of reintegration is increased. From an institutional point of view, both in Timisoara and Bucharest, public social work services offer the possibility of access to the bathroom and either to wash their clothes or to completely change them. Not only public actors offer this facility, but also private ones.

From the perspective of symbolic capital, homeless people do not have access to this type of capital. Lacking the sense of ownership, by the sense of

name, they do not represent anything even in the environment they are attending.

In relation to the numerical, quantitative criteria, after the census of the population and of the dwelling, made in 2011, a number of 23085 homeless people were registered at Bucharest level, which represents 1.4% of the total population. ⁱIn relation to the abovementioned bibliographical references, the poverty level is the main triggering factor of the dwelling loss. The economic crisis has accentuated the problems of vulnerable groups of people, leading, for example, to the loss of employment. A possible solution would be the benefits of the social economy, which should be taken into account (Goian, Stefanescu, 2013). (The social economy and innovative practices in the field can certainly be a catalyst for the social reintegration of homeless adults.

Respondents' perception of homeless adults

This study aims to highlight students' perception of the phenomenon of homeless adults, while assessing the degree of empathy.

Starting from the hypotheses that the community's perception of homeless adults is generally negative, but also that students have a higher degree of empathy towards homeless people compared to those who completed their studies, we ran in February-March 2018, a qualitative research to highlight particular aspects pertaining to the perception of homeless people and the phenomenon in general.

Due to constraints, the subjects were represented exclusively by students from Timisoara. However, because there is a large number of homeless people in Timisoara, it is relevant for the study. The sample comprised a total of 30 students. Of the potential respondents, none refused to take part in the study or abandoned the course, although this possibility was offered. Another feature of the sample is that all participants in the study have answered all the questions in full.

The applied questionnaire was one with open questions, with the qualitative side of the respondents' perception.

Among the items targeted were:

a. The need to involve authorities in providing assistance to homeless adults

- b. The attitude of the community towards the homeless, in the perception of the respondents
- c. The dynamics of the homeless phenomenon, in terms of the current trend
- d. Accepting ideas to live in the immediate vicinity of a homeless care center
- e. Respondents' perception of how the media reflects the phenomenon of homeless adults
- f. Importance of homeless adults in relation to other categories of people in difficulty

Regarding the authorities' attitude towards the homeless, respondents believe that this category of vulnerable people must be actively helped by the authorities, especially for reasons of belonging. Homeless people are perceived as lonely, "they have no one", people who "do not deserve to live on the street", "should go to a center." There are opinions frequently found in answers.

The perception of the community is seen, in full by the respondents, as a rejection one. The general opinion is that homeless people are rejected by the community and are seen as "dirty", "predisposed to crime". Respondents believe that the homeless are rejected and despised by the community. Often, in addition to repulsion, in the eyes of the community, those deprived of shelter stir up fear.

The number of homeless people and the dynamics of the phenomenon are seen as rising by the respondents. This is the opinion of 90% of the study participants. Others think the number stagnated. None of the respondents believe that the phenomenon is declining.

Media influence and the ability to inform is perceived positively, respondents believe that the media correctly reports the situation of homeless people, being a support, especially in winter, when the media sensitize citizens about homelessness. In warmer times, respondents believe, in a significant percentage, that the image of homeless adults in the media is fading away.

Conclusions:

Respondents show empathy towards homeless people and their situation. In terms of proximity, 10% of respondents do not like the idea of living in the proximity of a homelessness center, a behaviour motivated by the attitude of homeless people - they make a mess and are bothering.

What is significant in the respondents' perception is that the community is marginalizing or contributing to the marginalization of homeless people, even though the media is mainly addressing the issue of shelter especially during winter in a abjective way.

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