

Pedro Cabrera, María José Rubio, Jaume Blasco (2008)

***¿Quién duerme en la calle? Una investigación social y ciudadana sobre las personas sin techo [Who sleeps rough? A social and civic research study on the homeless]***

Barcelona: Fundación Caixa Catalunya, 234 pages.

[http://obrasocial.caixacatalunya.es/osocial/idiomes/2/fitxers/solidaritat/duerme\\_calle08.pdf](http://obrasocial.caixacatalunya.es/osocial/idiomes/2/fitxers/solidaritat/duerme_calle08.pdf)

Under the title “*Who sleeps rough?*” the Fundación Caixa de Catalunya has published what is undoubtedly one of the most extensive studies on the problem of homelessness in Spain, especially as regards people who sleep rough in Madrid and Barcelona.

The study, conducted by Professor of Sociology Pedro Cabrera in coordination with a team of sociologists from the Universidad Pontificia Comillas [Comillas Pontifical University] of Madrid and the Universidad Autónoma [Autonomous University] of Barcelona, is based essentially on a census taken on the night of 12 March 2008 in Barcelona in which, in addition to the Obra Social de Caixa Catalunya [Caixa Catalunya Charity], numerous organisations and institutions and some 1000 volunteers took part. These results were compared with those obtained in Madrid in the census of 26 February of the same year, organised by the City Council and other entities of that city. The study is further supplemented, at national level, with the presentation of the characteristics of homeless people according to the results of a survey conducted in 2005 by the National Statistical Institute, and at local level, by another census of people sleeping rough, conducted in this case in the city of Lleida on 28 April 2008.

The book comprises six chapters and various appendices. The first chapter contains a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the phenomenon of homelessness in Spain based on the results of the aforementioned survey of homeless people, taking as frame of reference the European Typology on Homelessness (Ethos). The main socio-demographic variables used to analyse the problem are gender, age, family situation, employment situation, nationality, period of homelessness, health, drug use, aid received from the social services, and employment

instability. The second chapter, to put the census operation carried out in Barcelona in perspective, describes the more recent development of social work with homeless people in that city, both from the political and institutional perspective, as well as in terms of the actual socio-demographic and care situation. After setting out the methodological questions of the census taken in Barcelona (geographic scope, observational and survey protocol, and limits of the census, timing, etc.) in the third chapter, the fourth chapter presents the results thereof in comparison with the data obtained from Madrid. The fifth chapter focuses on the role of the 1000 or so volunteers that made the census in Barcelona possible, essentially their function and experience. The final chapter of the study presents the main conclusions drawn from the research action carried out for the benefit of homeless people in Barcelona.

To summarise the results, the censuses revealed that 658 people were sleeping rough in Barcelona and 651 in Madrid. The data revealed that the vast majority of people sleeping rough were male (in 89% of the cases), they were relatively young (with an average age of 41) and predominantly of foreign background (in 53% and 62.2% of the cases in Madrid and Barcelona, respectively). It was also noted that one out of two homeless people spend the night in the more central parts of the city, and that in general, the period of homelessness is longer than one year (in 61.8% and 45.7% of the cases in Madrid and Barcelona, respectively). Likewise, most of them do not have a partner (between 72% and 78%), and their main sources of income are the sale of junk, begging, or benefit or subsidies. The main reasons cited for finding themselves homeless are lack of employment (25%) and its direct logical consequence, lack of money (22%), together with problems with their partner or family of origin (16%). Likewise, owing to the high percentage of migrants among these people, 10% cited their illegal immigration status, and consequently, the obstacles they encountered in finding employment, as the root of their problems.

The process and results of another census of people sleeping rough are contained in an appendix, i.e. the night census of 28 April 2008 in the city of Lleida. Unlike Madrid and Barcelona, Lleida is a medium-sized city of a little more than 130,000 inhabitants, though its size has not exempted it from homeless people. A total of 70 people were found to sleep rough in the city centre (mostly men (97%), predominantly foreign (75%)). The majority of males and the high percentage of migrants among the people sleeping rough in Lleida is undoubtedly due in large measure to the importance of the agricultural sector in the city's economy, and consequently, its capacity to attract unskilled labour, in many cases illegal migrants.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the value of the book extends further than analysing the problem of homelessness in Spain, as it constitutes a valuable practical, amply documented example -- inasmuch as it refers to methodological questions of a practical nature -- of the ever so difficult process of undertaking a census and study of people sleeping rough, i.e. of what is referred to in the American literature as street-night or survey-night count. And as the authors point out, these efforts must continue to be improved, not only for our knowledge of the problem of homelessness and thus the efficiency in eradicating it, but also to provide information for awareness raising among the citizenry about this serious social phenomenon.

***Jordi Bosch Meda.***