



Civil Society in the Field of Homelessness in Sweden

A Follow-up Study

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Background

- Research in the mid 1990's on civil society organisations' (CSO) roles in the social policy field of homelessness in Sweden
 - Homelessness - a “rediscovered” problem in the Swedish society
 - New interest in CSOs' role in the field of social welfare
- Since the turn to the 21'st century
 - Increased homelessness, new groups
 - A growing interest in CSOs' role and function within the field of social welfare



Aim and research questions

- To explore and analyze the current role(s) of civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged within the field of homelessness and, if and how, these roles have changed in recent decades
 - *What roles in relation to homelessness do the CSOs emphasize in the 2020s?*
 - *Are the roles of CSOs in the field of homelessness characterized by continuity or change?*



Methods and Materials

- ▶ Case studies in Stockholm and Gothenburg
- ▶ Mapping of organisations that provide services and support to persons in a situation of homelessness
- ▶ Interviews with 18 representatives of a selection of CSOs - both “traditional” organisations (The City Missions, Salvation Army, etc), and more recent initiated organisations and networks within the field.

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Homeless in Sweden in numbers

acc to National Board of Health and Welfare

Year	1993	1999	2005	2011	2017
Number	9 900	8 400	17 800	34 000	33 250

(Different definitions of homeless have been used in the diff. years).

2017

18 % (5 900) rough sleepers or in emergency housing

62 % men and 38 % women

57 % born in Sweden/ 43 % born in other countries

45 % financial assistance from the social services



The role(s) of civil society organisations within the field of homelessness

- Possess a long tradition– before the development of the Swedish welfare state – to supply services for homeless and poor.
- Historic division of labour within the organisational field of homelessness - between the public and voluntary sector – CSO's inhabit a “niche” to provide services to the most vulnerable and marginalized homeless persons and people who for various reasons do not have contacts with the municipal social services.

CSOs' roles: Voice, Services & Community

Voice

- Representation – advocacy for policy change, and on an individual level

Service

- Avant-garde - identify new groups and new social problems, initiate activities (eg. meeting places for elderly , support to "vulnerable EU citizens")
- Complement – offering services besides the public sector – soup kitchen, shelters, open day activities (shower, laundry, beds, breakfast and lunches)
- Alternative service - eg experince-based methods, services based on specific ideological or religious grounds
- Replacement – services to persons who has ended up outside of, or to groups with no or limited rights to, public social welfare; an extra social security network

Community

- An important part of the activities that the organisations offer, e.g. open day activities, membership.

(Ref. Wijkström et al 2021, Blennberger 1993)



Increasing roles

- Mediating and linking
 - Advocacy and representation of individuals
 - Legal support and interpretation
 - Information and capacity building
 - Support to enter digital systems

Conclusion: Continuity *and* change

- The traditional division of labor – CSO's niche - remains
- Voice – limited but strengthened through a new umbrella organisation for local City Missions
- Services
 - Growing cooperation between civil society and public sector, e.g. by involvement in Housing first-projects
 - Procurement and professionalisation
 - Increased need for financial support (especially during the Corona pandemic), incl food, help with rent and bills
 - New groups demand new types of support, e.g. legal aid to migrants in homelessness
 - The digitalisation of society generates new support needs
 - Support to persons "outside" or with limited rights to public social welfare

Concluding remarks

The demand for CSOs service and support within the field of homelessness has increased over time

CSOs' niche:

- First step - into the public welfare system – growing need of mediating and linking.
 - Higher thresholds to enter the public welfare system?
- Last step – an extra social security network for those outside or with limited rights to the public welfare system.
 - A new social landscape with more people in a marginal position in relation to the housing market and to the public welfare system



Thank you for your attention!

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