

Routes out of poverty and isolation for older homeless people: a comparative study between Poland and the UK

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The ideological models

- Citizenship, within the solidarity paradigm, includes the notion of work as a form of service or obligation to the wider community.
- There is an intrinsic morality contained within the solidarity model, which stems from a combination of Catholicism and fraternity, hence it sits most comfortably within some of the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, where the two traditions (religion and the egalitarian state) converge.
- Solidarity has come to encompass the concepts of unity and social cohesion, it implies connection with the community which includes contributing through work.
- In a social context it is interpreted as a framework for repairing the social bonds ruptured following the upheaval of the demise of the communist state

The ideological models

- The Social inclusion paradigm, largely accepted within the EU as a useful model, has tended to focus on those things that enable participation within society
- This includes participation through employment, as lack of work may lead to poverty and exclusion from social networks and opportunities

Two different paradigms

- Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition not rooted in cohesion but in individualism
 - Typified by the ‘individual’ response to homelessness
 - Own tenancy, individual support plans etc
- Combination of Catholicism and solidarity emphasises the obligations to state, society and fellowman (or woman!)
 - Social integration is not achieved through either liberal individualism or citizenship alone but seeks to reconcile these through an emphasis on work

Fragmentation?

- Social inclusion can be conceptualised as an attempt to reconcile the tradition of solidarity with the rise of individualism
 - In seeking routes out of homelessness, the UK has tended towards a compartmentalisation of the different aspects of inclusion
 - Housing, work, health, education etc
 - Exception - the theory of the Foyer model for young people
- However, there is an argument that over the last few decades, public policy in the UK has consistently undermined social solidarity

The study organisations

- Barka – Poland
- Emmaus – UK
- Common factors – both sit somewhat outside the mainstream of provision and take an approach that is not part of the ‘common culture’ of how to tackle homelessness
- Both are rooted in inclusion or solidarity through employment, this being integral to their philosophy
 - Use similar terminology

The study organisations

- Both are most successful with older men who often have a history of alcohol misuse
 - They also have a strict abstinence policy, though Barka expect abstinence at all times not just on their premises
- Both provide employment opportunities within a 'sheltered' environment, with an expectation that people will engage in full-time work to the best of their abilities

The study organisations

- Both have an ethos of reaching out to the wider community
- People can stay as long as they wish
 - Providing basic expectations are complied with
- Emphasis on living within a supportive community
 - The sharing of meals is symbolic
- Opportunity for more formal engagement with the organisation as a 'leader'

The study organisations

- An established track record of social enterprise
 - Emmaus focuses on renovation and recycling
 - Some also run a cafe
 - Barka more diverse though small scale
 - Garden centre
 - Street paper
 - Homecare service
 - Animal husbandry

Does it work?

- Statistical evidence is lacking
- Both organisations have a 'core' of people who stay with them long-term
 - Others may return several times, or find it is not for them
- The opportunity to work is highly valued
 - Both organisations develop an ethos of shared responsibility
- Community and acceptance is regarded as equally important by those who stay

A different approach

- Approach in the UK is embedded in a philosophy of the housing of the individual being the key component
 - Solutions to homelessness revolve around secure housing plus an individual package of support as appropriate
- Barka and Emmaus embody a different approach which puts work and community at the heart
 - Housing is only part of this, and although important, does not stand in isolation

Implications

- Poverty within the social inclusion model utilised in the UK is often perpetuated even after being rehoused
 - Many people will continue to claim benefits
- Poverty is lack of money, but also poverty in terms of quality of life
 - Isolation and loneliness
 - Low self-esteem
 - Lack of meaningful occupation
- Tenancies are known to fail because of these factors

Implications

- The importance of employment and social contact have been highlighted in previous work
- A solidarity paradigm appears to offer a different model which merits more consideration for some people
- These organisations offer a pathway out of homelessness, primarily for older men that offers enhanced self-esteem through being part of a community and through work

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