

New Approaches to Support the Homeless Population: The Case of the Homeless in Lisbon

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Abstract: The paper aims to provide better knowledge of the reality experienced by the homeless population in the City of Lisbon and, simultaneously, to offer a first reflection on the effectiveness and scope of the strategies that have been conducted by the Lisbon City Council and associations/organizations that support people living on the streets. The methodology used in this work is based on the collection of bibliography and statistical data on the subject; consultation of Municipal City Plans and the launch, treatment and analysis of a questionnaire (with statistical relevance) with the street and homeless population of the capital.

Key words: poverty, homeless, Lisbon, strategy, plan

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1. Introduction

The paper main objective is to provide better knowledge of the reality experienced by the homeless population in the City of Lisbon and, simultaneously, to offer a first reflection on the effectiveness and scope of the strategies that have been conducted by the Lisbon City Council and associations/organizations that support the population with so-called “street living”. The methodology used in this work is based on three fundamental steps: collection of bibliography and available statistical data on the subject of homelessness in the City of Lisbon; consultation of Municipal City Plans proposing a set of strategies to combat the scourge of homelessness in Lisbon; launch, treatment and analysis of a survey (with statistical relevance) with the homeless and homeless population in the capital of São Paulo. As a fundamental objective of communication, the best and broadest knowledge of the reality of the homeless and homeless population in the City of Lisbon is included. The breadth

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and relevance of the research represent a novelty in the framework of studies that have been produced both in the scientific/academic sphere and in terms of surveys carried out by various entities that work in the field of supporting Homeless Citizens. On the other hand, we will integrate some clues resulting from the guidelines of the new Support Plan for the Homeless of the City of Lisbon, with a time horizon defined for 2024-2030. Therefore, we believe it is possible to present a broader picture of the entire problem associated with the phenomenon of homelessness in the City of Lisbon, comparing an evaluative exercise (“what was done”) with future strategic references (“what we plan to do”). In this way, we hope to contribute to an urgent debate within Portuguese society regarding the progressive adaptation of strategies to new profiles of the homeless and homeless population.

2. Methods

In studies on homeless people, and for reasons of the complexity of accessing the population to be researched, whether due to their mobility, fears, lack of Portuguese language proficiency, the norm has been to opt for non-probabilistic sampling techniques such as “Snowball sampling” or the intentional sampling.

It is important to mention that, despite the option for a non-probabilistic sample, the conclusions reached by the different studies are valid and encourage the expansion of knowledge about the phenomenon of homelessness.

In the present case, we sought to go further and set a goal of collecting information that could have probabilistic/statistical significance.

Using the sample calculation tool — COMMENTTO — the numerical parameters of research to be carried out were adjusted, in order to achieve a dimension of confidence level, and sampling error, typical of studies with probabilistic samples (in Annex I, you will find the synthesis of the parameters obtained using the COMMENTTO sample calculation tool).

In this way, the values of 195 and 338 validated surveys were defined as goals to be achieved with the collection of data from the homeless and homeless population. It should be noted, in this context, that the work of Marques and Lúcio (2018) was, in a way, a pioneer in the option of seeking to obtain, on a large scale, data resulting from interviews/research with this population.

Therefore, we can summarize the information obtained within the framework of this evaluation work into two large groups:

- a) Enquiries with the Rooflessness and Houselessness Population;
- b) Interviews with different Stakeholders with interest, intervention, implementation of strategies/actions and implementation of policies within the scope of supporting the homeless population.

As part of the evaluation of the Municipal Plan for Homeless People 2019-2023, surveys were carried out among homeless people in the city of Lisbon, with the aim of collecting 198 first-person testimonies on issues such as health, education, housing, work, expectations and desires.

Survey collection began on June 22nd and ended on July 19th, with a total of 198 validated surveys.

The collaboration of the partner entities “Serve the City” and “Comunidade Vida e Paz” was requested to collaborate in the application of the research as these institutions have several volunteers on their teams.

There was also support from the Lisbon City Council Volunteer Grant.

With the initial objective of covering each of the 24 parishes per day, the strategy ended up being adapted to cover two or more parishes on the same day, due to the small number of volunteers available (due to various

factors, such as holidays, final exams, university, professional reasons, among others) and also bearing in mind that not all parishes have the same number of homeless people.

The investigations began on June 22, in the afternoon, walking through the parish of Areeiro, which proved to be quite difficult as the temperature was very high.

The parish has a large area, with the population of homeless people in quite dispersed areas and it was also found that the areas referred to as overnight stays are generally without anyone during the day. This may also be due to the fact that, as it is summer, there are better conditions (more hours of light and higher temperatures) for people to wander around the city until later in the day in search of subsistence or entertainment.

Therefore, it is important to reflect that the weather conditions, which included, in particular, a heat wave, led to the need to adapt the survey application strategy for the morning or evening periods.

Between the 22nd of June and the 19th of July, several areas of the city were covered, with a special focus on the areas with the highest density of the target population, such as Gare do Oriente, the Viaduto de Santa Apolónia, Lisbon Airport and the area Avenida Almirante Reis and Martim Moniz, but also the Campolide area with a large Romanian community in shack structures, next to the train lines.

The last day of the surveys took place on July 19th, in the parish of São Vicente, next to the Local Support Center that provides support to the PSSA, in terms of hygiene, clothing and food, ensuring that there was no duplication of respondents.

After survey number 198 was carried out, the EPPMPSSA ETR was left with the spirit of mission accomplished with regard to surveys and the certainty that there is still a lot of work to be done to reduce the gap in vulnerability among all the people who choose Lisbon as their professional and personal destination.

Therefore, we believe that the greatest added value of this evaluation work lies precisely in obtaining systematic and comprehensive information from stakeholders and the homeless and homeless population and, by extension, in the analysis and evaluation of the results.

3. Results and Discussion

At this point, it is important to summarize some of the most relevant aspects of the analyzes resulting from the studies/research carried out:

a) firstly, we must point out that all the studies carried out resulted, from the beginning, from a wide range of meetings between the Lisbon City Council and the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, where it was possible to gather information on a wide range of initiatives, translated into projects that the municipality, both individually and in cooperation with other institutions, launched and implemented within the Plan horizon (2019-2023).

b) secondly, it was possible to observe a high level of implementation of the proposed initiatives, within the scope of this Plan, an example of which is the group of responses/projects included in the signaling and transition axes;

c) it is interesting to mention that several projects/responses are ongoing in nature, so their evaluation will have to be parameterized according to this reality;

d) in the Signage axis, we must highlight the benefits of the measure “Ensuring the monitoring of the street phenomenon, the response to signs and the reduction of PSSA”, since the data collected within the scope of the execution of the different projects financed by the CML (ETR | Accommodation) allow you to maintain an updated record of the reality experienced and, as a consequence, monitor the evolution of the phenomenon on a

monthly basis.

e) the studies carried out also made it possible to highlight the importance of the cooperative/collaborative dimension between the Lisbon City Council and other entities of a national nature (Social Security Institute – ISS) or local (SCML) – see, for example, answers in the Prevention axis (socio-economic stability) or the Street Intervention axis (articulation in access to public services and social benefits);

f) in certain situations it was possible to verify that the reasons for not carrying out responses/projects reside in situations not controllable by the city hall (see, for example, in the Prevention axis the issues associated with case managers) or, in other cases, in information/surveys that were not capable of being implemented in a timely manner given the horizon of the Plan (see, for example, in the Emergency axis, local support sub-axis, the situation of the NALs in Parque das Nações and the West Zone, where no it was possible to identify a suitable location, within the scope of municipal heritage, for the projected initiative);

g) it was interesting to note that, in certain situations, attempts were made to make the best use of extraordinary support funds (in the case of the PRR) to requalify existing responses: see, for example, in the Transition axis, the responses associated with the Accommodation Center of the Beato, including social housing, shared apartments and insertion communities, with application to the PRR in the execution phase and completion scheduled for 2026 (already, therefore within the validity horizon of the future plan);

h) within the scope of this Plan, the focus on building a broad database (including the homeless/houseless population and stakeholders) and with probabilistic/statistical significance is worth highlighting. In this way, the Lisbon City Council was in possession of an instrument that will allow, in the coming years, to support several decisions and strategic bets within the framework of support for the homeless population;

i) from collecting information through surveys with the homeless population, it was possible to verify that a certain “classic” general profile of the homeless population in São Paulo remains – a predominance of men aged up to fifty/sixty;

j) it is important to mention that the “single/divorced” category represents $\frac{3}{4}$ of the homeless population, which may indicate that, in several cases, there may be situations of abandonment and family forgetfulness;

k) regarding the level of education, the information collected allowed us to find a differentiating element in relation to more traditional profiles of the homeless population – almost 30% of those interviewed have secondary or even higher qualifications. The new pattern of migrants arriving in our country in search of a new life opportunity may contribute to this situation as an explanatory factor;

l) the research carried out allowed us to conclude that there is a high level of unemployed population: 88% of those who responded to the survey stated that they were unemployed;

m) the data collected offers some concern given that 1/3 of those interviewed declared that they had been homeless for more than three years. Therefore, strategies/responses aimed at this population face a greater challenge here, given that integration and autonomy tend to be more difficult and, predictably, slower;

n) homeless people tend to stay at night in places such as Parque das Nações, Santa Apolónia and Arroios, and, during the day, several of the interviewees mentioned the same spaces, but, equally, that “circulate the city” (about 20% of all who responded). There is, therefore, a “particular geography” of the homeless population that must be taken into account – they opt for places close to railway stations (Santa Apolónia or Oriente) but also walk the streets of the capital, perhaps revealing a geographic mobility dictated by the need to find/seek answers to your situation;

o) in direct correlation with what was mentioned in the previous paragraph, we found the type of support that

the homeless declared they needed most: housing and employment. In the first category, several interviewees mentioned that at least “a place to sleep” would be important/pressing. So, perhaps at first, even before hosting in the sense of “home”, a space where they can stay overnight is already considered very positive. Here we find full justification for the relevance and reinforcement of the “Emergency” and later “Transition” axes. The concentration of responses related to support for professional insertion (obtaining a job) reveals that the homeless person is fully aware of the importance of finding a paid professional activity that gives them greater income stability and, consequently, better chances to avoid remaining in “street life”. Reinforcing the urgency of expanding solutions associated with professional issues is the worrying fact that the majority of interviewees do not have any family support (more than 85% of situations). We are, therefore, faced with a population that, essentially, can only count on itself. The responses set out in the Municipal Plans can be considered, considering the reality described here, as authentic experiences of (re)socialization, meaning they imply a fight against abandonment;

p) surveys of the homeless population made it possible to detect the presence of individuals with diverse pathologies, involving respiratory, cardiac, ophthalmological problems, among others, and addictive consumption, with emphasis on alcohol. In this context, we must consider that health care will always represent a structuring element of any strategy given that the disease is heightened and aggravated by street experiences.

4. Conclusions

a) As a first suggestion/clue for the 2024-2030 Plan, it should be proposed that the future evaluation exercise begins simultaneously with the implementation of the initiatives proposed within the Plan: due to the diversity of actions/responses, the multiplicity of actors involved, the scope strategies, we consider that an ongoing evaluation exercise represents the most appropriate and potentially most rewarding solution, since, among other advantages, it allows and promotes the adaptability of the entire process depending on the demands and readings that, at a given moment, are carried out within the framework of the implementation of the different responses. In this way, it will undoubtedly be useful that, simultaneously with the launch of the new 2024-2030 strategy/plan, work begins leading to an evaluative reading of what is being implemented;

b) Invest in the implementation of a monitoring dynamic that allows deepening and broadening the knowledge bases of the problems associated with different street experiences, thus enabling mechanisms for the evolutionary adaptation of responses;

c) Within the scope of the future 2024-2030 Plan, it will be important to study, in an appropriate time, equity solutions appropriate to the initiatives and projects considered in the Homeless Population Support Plan;

d) Within the framework of the future 2024-2030 Plan, we believe that it will always be important to seek, within the framework of monitoring and evaluation, to envisage the best use of opportunities arising from a given national/European situation;

e) In the future 2024-2030 Plan, we believe that particular attention should be paid to the Transition/Autonomy axis, where very interesting projects have been developed/valued (reference target in this Report) given the high impact on the sustainability of the responses (continued ability to obtain income);

f) The strategic investment in solutions of greater temporal scope, that is, with investments in responses with broader horizons, should give the future Plan a logic of impact and articulation with municipal initiatives aimed at the problem of homelessness;

g) For the future Plan, it must be taken into account that, at the present time, not all PSSAs have a Case Manager — this is a situation that must deserve reflection, particularly if we take into account the current pressure on resources and the predictable increase in complex situations from a social point of view, resulting from migratory phenomena, involving both new arrivals and the implementation of family reunification measures. Therefore, we think that the 2024-2030 Plan should include reinforcement measures within the scope of the first reception of migrants in situations of greater fragility;

h) Within the framework of the future Plan, particular attention must be given to combating situations of abandonment and forgetfulness, taking into account the problem of loneliness which affects a considerable proportion of all those who experience life on the streets;

i) Taking into account recent observations regarding the diversification of nationalities of homeless people, the future Plan should reinforce the focus on creative solutions/approach methods, such as the use of peers (peer to peer methodology) peer) in contact with those who do not have knowledge of Portuguese or English;

j) The higher levels of education of the homeless population also offer other possibilities in the field of learning and professional insertion. In the design of the next Plan (2024-2030), and taking into account this new reality, we believe it is important to consider strengthening the axis corresponding to Insertion/Autonomization, particularly in responses already foreseen in the current Plan, an example of which is the creation of scholarships of employment.

k) As a result of the previous paragraph, it is fair to state that the responses to be considered in the future must be particularly active (to the extent that this is possible given the intrinsic reality of each PSSA) regarding professional/school training and subsequent insertion into the labor market. work concerns. A point to be taken into consideration is the predominance of two sectors of activity — civil construction and restaurants. Thus, these two branches of activity maintain a significant capacity for generating employment within the urban economy, so that strengthening contacts with companies in these sectors may prove to be a strategy to be considered in the medium-term future;

l) Within the framework of the future 2024-2030 Plan, it will be necessary, as far as possible, to combat considerable periods spent living on the streets, in order to make responses more effective and integration strategies predictably faster;

m) Maintain a clear focus on health care involving the double dimension of pathologies/addictive consumption – improving the life situation of all those who experience homelessness/homelessness, will involve the implementation of appropriate strategies within the scope of combating the disease (mental and physical) and reducing addictions;

n) From the data collected, it was possible to conclude that the dimensions of accommodation/employment/health care represent essential vectors for the success of a strategy aimed at supporting the homeless population. Therefore, a future Plan must take into account that solutions aimed at housing, the continued generation of income and the provision of health services, will have to represent crucial vectors of investment in human capital, technical resources and physical capital, in order to create better conditions for the success of the strategies that may be defined.

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