

## HANDLE WITH CARE:

# How local authorities approach the fight against social exclusion in the post-industrial Italian city of Turin.

by **Paolo Brusa**, Italy - HOMELESSNESS *in Europe* - Feantsa Magazine, summer 2005



The City of Turin will soon be known Europe-wide for hosting the 2006 Winter Olympics. Much like any other city, Turin has its commercial side and the bright image which it projects, but also a more complex social side, that is the inheritance of the city's past. In terms of inhabitants, the city of Turin was more or less stable from its Roman foundation in the third century B.C., until its major development started during 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it became the first capital of the Unitarian state. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially after the 1950s, Turin's development was directly connected to its industries, which made it known as the FIAT-city. During the 1950s, almost 440 000 persons arrived in Turin, and more than 2 out of 3 became permanent residents. The massive migration from the south of Italy transformed the city from a big village into a big city of more than 1.1 million inhabitants<sup>1</sup>, with almost 450.000<sup>2</sup> people directly employed in economic activities related to the car industry.

From the 80s on, the global industrial recession generated a radical shift to a post-industrial scenario, as the majority of the economic activities crashed or changed their focus to the tertiary sector. The impact of such changes greatly influenced the population, both in terms of number and of composition: the overall population decreased from its former high to 904.616<sup>3</sup>, while the percentage of the new became considerable, with some 90.450<sup>4</sup> people, including significant numbers from Romania (32%), Albania (17%), and Morocco (7%).

These significant changes gave rise to vast need range of related needs in the struggle to survive as a social environment. Migration flows started to be evident during the 90's decade, with an overall decrease of Italians and an increase of migrants. From this decade onwards, it was clear that the former "Fiat-city" simply no longer existed: in order to survive as a social environment, Turin had to change its focus, its priorities, its policies and its way of life in order to ensure new practical answers to emerging new needs. The changing population set a clear, new integration process in

<sup>1</sup> Data on population taken from [www.cronologia.it/demog.00.htm](http://www.cronologia.it/demog.00.htm) and [www.demo.istat.it](http://www.demo.istat.it) \* (official census)

Year	1935	1951*	1961*	1971*	1981*	1991*	2003
Population	647.997	719.300	1.025.822	1.177.939	1.117.154	962.507	861.644

<sup>2</sup> M. Revelli – Lavorare in Fiat - [www.geocities.com/alpcub/fiatrev2.html](http://www.geocities.com/alpcub/fiatrev2.html) - 158.445

<sup>3</sup> Data on 29<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2004, from Municipality of Turin, Statistic Office

<sup>4</sup> Data on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. 2004, from Migrants Pastoral Statistical Office – [www.diocesi.torino.it/curia/migranti](http://www.diocesi.torino.it/curia/migranti)

motion, in which the percentage of migrants tends to constantly grow, leading the actual size of the migrant population to 1 out of 10.

Society in Turin was affected by a change in terms of its composition and by a general process of impoverishment, due to the combination of the industrial crisis, the fall in purchasing power and the punishing economic recession. A part of society blamed the new migrants for the situation of general impoverishment. The city again experienced more or less the same process of exclusion and discrimination as thirty years before: but this time discrimination was no longer by northern inhabitants against southern migrants, but by “Italians” against new migrants. The integration process was also influenced by other variables – for example, the general poverty reduced the possibilities of accessing affordable apartments, or of finding decent jobs with reasonable salaries.

The need to change and to identify comprehensive answers to the new social necessities had a double effect: the attempt to secure the social environment by changing and renewing the urban scenario created new threats of social exclusion and poverty. On the one hand, the urban focus moved from an industrial city to a cultural and touristic destination, and the whole urban fabric was rearranged: new residential districts grew in places where once there were only industries, the oldest neighbourhoods were renovated, and various activities emerged in the tertiary sector. But on the other hand, the general impoverishment, the difficulties in finding long-term working contracts and the higher rent in the renovated neighbourhoods pushed the former lower-middle class out of the city-centre, while the safety of the most vulnerable section of society was threatened and quickly became a priority issue.

In a changing society, the problem of social exclusion and the range of issues and factors in play changed as well: the factors contributing to homelessness emerged from a melting pot of old and new social problems, with new elements including the significant percentage of middle-aged men formerly working in industry finding themselves without employment and the issues related to migration. The general impoverishment of the social environment also created the phenomenon of so-called “grey-poverty”. The term denotes the huge number of people<sup>5</sup>, living in apartments, but far below the poverty line. In Italy this phenomenon is not considered as homelessness, due to a one-dimensional perception of the problem of homelessness, that identifies homeless people only in terms of housing and includes only rough-sleepers. But while the phenomenon of the “grey poverty” certainly exists and is still mainly un-monitored, homelessness is starting to be more and more evident.

The changes in the social environment and the emergence of new social exclusion issues were constantly monitored by local authorities, through a fruitful dialogue between local actors (voluntary groups and NGOs<sup>6</sup>) and the Municipality. Up to the end of the 70s, the majority of social services were run by voluntary associations, but in 1981 the “Adults in Need Office”<sup>7</sup> opened to the public and started to manage and direct services and interventions. The evidence of new social needs and the policies created in order to tackle them lead to a constant growth and differentiation of services. The growth was also due to a well-known effect: as new shelters are created, the number of homeless using the direct-access services tends to increase<sup>8</sup>. During the late 90s, the

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<sup>5</sup> Around 90.000 people are estimated to live in the “grey poverty” bracket in Turin. At a national level, 11.8% of the whole population is at risk of poverty, meaning 2 360 000 families, or 6 686 00 individuals -data from *www.istat.it*

<sup>6</sup> I use the title “NGOs” in a general way, to denote a whole set of various bodies, including the different kind of co-operatives, foundations, the private third sector and so on.

<sup>7</sup> The “Ufficio Adulti in Difficoltà”, literally “Adults in need Office”, was set up in 1981 as a first step towards the creation of a local network of services for Turin's homeless.

<sup>8</sup> The stock-taking of data, done by the “Reservation and monitoring service”, showed the systematic emergence of

range of available services increased constantly, as the number of registered homeless continued to grow. From 1995 on, almost every year some new service was opened<sup>9</sup>, and the whole range of them started to get organized on a three-tiered structure<sup>10</sup>.

The investment and the efforts directed into the to fight against homelessness lead to Turin being taken as an example at national level. But this “indirect marketing” generated another paradoxical effect: the growing availability of places within services drew homeless people to Turin from other districts, towns and regions, where no efficient policies or no policies at all were in place. As the global costs increased, it became necessary to focus on who were supposed to be covered by Turin's resources and who were supposed to depend on their original city council. The difference between residents and non-residents started to have a direct impact in terms of access to night accommodation and general opportunities for reintegration<sup>11</sup>. In order to avoid discrimination, the Municipality created a virtual address for every person asking for social help or access to a reinsertion programme: it became possible also for non-residents to be “certified” as resident homeless. However, in a couple of years, this valuable effort also generated a kind of perverse effect, whereby, when the system of virtual residences became known, a stigma became attached to it and it was associated with social exclusion and homelessness and those with such an address started to face huge difficulties in finding job and flat, because of the prejudices spread in the population.

The positive development of services and their progressive diversification in terms what they can offer was a direct and parallel effect of constant monitoring and analysis. The NGOs greatly contributed to the development of a multi-dimensional approach to the phenomenon, making proposals and suggestions to the Municipality through constant contact and dialogue, and the Municipality itself led the development towards the present services structure, that is, an integrated organisational structure, with specific services to meet specific needs<sup>12</sup>. This new organisation of services is based on the fact that the homeless are first and foremost simply people and must be treated as people rather than as social cases or social costs<sup>13</sup>. Like any human being, homeless

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hidden homelessness. This official Municipality data concerns the number of single users per year only for the direct access dormitories (meaning the number of people sharing the available 155 beds per night):

<i>year</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Man	460	613	616	686	650
Woman	66	92	93	129	129
<b>Total</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>779</b>
Italians	379	499	485	503	508
Migrants	147	206	224	312	271

<sup>9</sup> Temporary dormitories, opened for the “winter emergency programme”, simply didn't close in spring and became year-round service, or, at other times, State's emergency funds were used.

<sup>10</sup> The three typologies are different in terms of level of accessibility, opening time and presence/absence of an educative programme. They are:

- 1- street work, direct access services, shelters and dormitories;
- 2- first level: transitional shelters;
- 3- second level: community living services and shared houses.

<sup>11</sup> In direct access services, the accommodation is guaranteed for 30 nights for residents, but only 7 for non-residents; all the services of first and second level are reserved only to residents.

<sup>12</sup> In May 2005 the calls for tender for services run by NGOs specified the following organisation:

- Direct access services: 8 direct access dormitories (total 155 beds), a daily street service, a night van street service, a call center, a daily integrated social-sanitary first aid centre, a pre-reinsertion laboratory;
- first level services: 3 move-on dormitories (of which 1 for women and 1 for elderly and ill cases, 50 places);
- second level services: 3 community living services (of which 1 for women and 1 for elderly and ill cases, 12 places), 8 shared house (of which 2 for women and 1 elderly and ill cases cases, 28 places).

<sup>13</sup> Considering homelessness as “social cases” or as “social costs” will never be officially said by anyone, but it happens in reality when there is a particular implicit way to define the issue: for example, when the single year

peoples are complex individuals and so approaching their needs cannot be reduced to “simple actions” based on “linearity”. Needs are not simply “the” need for housing, work, relationships, support, health care and so on. Like everyone else, the specific and individual needs of homeless people is the sum of the how they have lived each of these “general” needs in a personal way, within their individual biography, within the overall framework of the practical and material context in which they live, that is to say, priorities set at the political level and the practical, structural resources available for living in dignity.

Turin's structured offer of services is the result of time, experience, good practice and of the constant mutual contact between all actors involved<sup>14</sup>. During the 90s, these efforts lead to the building of specific “Round-tables”, with regular meetings of various actions and periodic assemblies. These round-tables were informal at the outset, as they were simply meant as a place where all actors could share their analysis and good practices, or to focus together on specific emergencies in order to develop common lines of action. The official and formal definition of these round-tables came only later, with the Italian Law 328<sup>15</sup>, of the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2000, named “General Law to put in place integrated systems for intervention in social policies”.

As the Law 328/00 clearly structured the interventions at a decentralised level, it became possible to influence governmental social policies at a local level, through participation in the Local Action Plan (named “Piani di Zona”) periodic round-tables and meetings, in which all social actors are invited to participate. Turin City Council officially recognised certain Round-tables, such as the “Round-table on social exclusion”, which was institutionalised by the signature of the legal representatives of the participating agencies during 2001. In the course of its existence, the round-table has seen the development of good practices in terms of the evolution of a concrete network, which includes all social actors interested in developing services to combat social exclusion. The network is open, in order to allow any one to join in. Different networks cover both different urban areas and various issues, and they are all supposed to interact and meet at a highest political level in order to develop integrated policies.

At the moment, the complete integration of the policies is still something of a “new year’s resolution”, though some specific service interventions are already reality. One such integrated action that has already been put in place is the so-called “Social-sanitary First Aid Centre<sup>16</sup>”, a

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budget is more evident the overall social cost of integrated policies.

<sup>14</sup> The number of disposable places in the different structures (all typologies, both public, private, voluntary and religious shelters) is globally around 900 beds – official data from “Adults in needs office”

<sup>15</sup> The Law allows local government to write and pass specific Directives based on the subsidiarity principle in order to favour the creation of real integrated policies. The Law is thought to favour the passage of responsibility throughout the entire policy-system from central government down to municipalities and local community authorities. The 328/2000 is a funding law and it’s totally run by Regional Governments, on the basis of their own territorial priorities. The Law sets out specific obligations:

- «... - responsibility for the definition of civil and social rights, meaning the essential minimum support rests with the Italian government;
- on the essential minimum support, italian government sets out Sectorial Action Plans;
- planning, coordination, management are the responsibility of the Regional governments, in cooperation with Municipalities.
- Regional governments will work at regional level;
- Municipalities will work on Local Action Plans, to act on priority issues. A monitoring system is supposed to take stock of the whole system...»

The applicability depends on single Regional planning and funds, with the result that the applications are not always carried through, as the latest NAP itself says: «...the majority of Regional Government started the first yearly Local Action Plans, but only some ended the first yearly plans...».

<sup>16</sup> The service opened in Turin's main station during May 2000 as a first-aid response to the risk of a dermatitis

multidisciplinary service run by an integrated team<sup>17</sup> whose approach is basically modelled on the open method of coordination. The service's management is based on an integration of the different professions, which periodically meet and exchange. Thus the approach seeks to guarantee professional independence, while within the overall structure the whole service-body still maintains good dialogue, communication and the sharing of information between the various parts. Another considerable value is the fact that it's the first service of such complexity which has been put straight in place at the location where the need is evident: it's a well thought-out new approach in the Italian social service sector, which usually operates on the principle that the users must find and go to the services, and that the social problems are not supposed to be too visible, especially at the urban centre.

The reason why such an integrated service is a good example rather than a common practice in the fight against social exclusion is the result of a mixture of critical points and open problems. One critical point is a sort of "institutional paradox": on the one hand, the Italian welfare system focuses on the offer of specific services for specific problems in a vertical logic of areas of intervention. This vertical definition offers precise answers, certainly, but it is ill-equipped to deal with the multi-faceted complexity of social exclusion. On the other hand, the Law 238/2000 is based on the principle of devolution, in order to maximize concrete integrated actions, while the formal Round-tables have the duty to work with the City Councils on the evaluation of the existing services, the priorities for the future and the economic planning for service management. Thus the welfare structure is shared out, while at the same time, it is supposed to be horizontal and coordinated: the coexistence of two such different structural approaches may encounter big difficulties, as a schizophrenic can well explain.

This "institutional paradox" gives rise to two main effects. Firstly, there is the not-always-easy dialogue between NGOs, Municipality and community-level authorities. This difficulty may be connected with the political persuasion of local authorities, who may sometimes be more interested in political concerns than in approaching the problems for what they really are. This difficulty has another correlated cause, which has to do with high-level political decisions in terms of allocation of government funding, which is generally decreasing, as the priority of welfare does at state level.

Another problematic aspect is the rather defensive relationship between the agencies, as the funding system is structured on tenders-for-contracts<sup>18</sup>, which is based on the competition. Every service has been licensed by the Municipality with transitory contracts for a various period of time, usually two or more years. In this system, the agencies, which are sharing their know-how at the different Round-tables, are in competition for the award of the contracts for running social services. This competition creates a risk that the integrated approach will apply only to those actions in which it is structurally necessary, while in all other cases operating on the basis of own expertise and more-or-less formal networking is the reality. So, while the agencies continue to cooperate with coordinated interventions at local Round-tables, they keep on competing at contract time, with considerable results, in terms of fall-out effects, on the entire process of fighting social exclusion.

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epidemic (mostly scabies) among rough-sleepers (mostly elderly ones) located in the station and its surroundings.

<sup>17</sup> The team is the result of the following coordinated structure: doctors from local Health Dep. ASL1, psychiatrists from local Mental Disorder Dep., psychologists and pedagogies from local Drug Prevention Center, nurses from Italian Red Cross, social workers from 'Adults in need Office' and from various NGOs, as well as peer operators from voluntary groups.

<sup>18</sup> The Law 328/00 suggests eliminating this call for tender and favouring the creation of Round-tables to which will be invited only the agencies that are certified for their professional capacities on specific issue. At the moment this new direction has not been taken yet.

Like almost everywhere in Europe, we are also facing the progressive dismantling of the welfare state. This is said to be happening because of different international political interests and because of a general economic crisis. Because of the Italian devolved system, it's left to the "discretion" of local government the way to use their financial possibilities, which tends to decrease.

A visible effect in Turin is the progressive disappearance of high-level qualifications<sup>19</sup> inside the teams running the services, as the highest professional qualifications means also a higher budget. As a result of the economic crisis, the "call for tenders" budget may decrease, and so become a sort of moral blackmail. NGOs are asked to run services because of their own competence and experience: what a value in terms of what is declared as goals, methods and objectives, it is not necessarily a value in terms of recognition for the social work<sup>20</sup>. As it's up to each single local government to manage their own funds, in accordance with the devolution principle, it's now incumbent on every single NGO to decide whether to offer its employees for the salary for an assistant position, or the salary that corresponds to the work that may be done in reality, that of the social worker<sup>21</sup>.

The economic issue is just one of the causes that generates such paradoxes. Two others in particular deserve some attention: the operating-process and the decision-making process. The operative process generally consists of a set of formal actions, based on the mutual recognition of different competencies. So, while at a formal level, the Municipality may recognise the status of NGO social workers mostly as assistants<sup>22</sup>, it might also happen that the public social-worker, who has in charge the users, is subject to no controls in evaluating with the daily work done by NGOs. The risk is the well-known paradox of the distance between the daily operative work and the periodic institutional visits. But while the worker closer to the ground has no official recognition, the more distant assumes the power to decide everything itself. This means that there is no structural guarantee, and that the process is left to the intellectual honesty of the actors on both side. A structural mutual recognition may also be long in coming.

The second paradox is a sort of development of the last example. The Round-tables are a very innovative structure to institutionalise the need to integrate social services; but at the same time, there is a risk that the real impact will be restricted solely to the level of common analysis and exchange, because of the true nature of the position of the various actors. The Municipality has the indisputable power to write the calls for tender, and so to decide how to recognize efforts, experiences, competencies, professionalism and to set the overall budget. On the other hand, NGOs have the indisputable power of know-how, of flexibility, of proximity to the problems, but they have to compete once every two year, and they have no chances to discuss the evidence of the "misunderstandings" in the calls for tender<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> The hierarchy of social workers is: the ones with a degree in social work, the ones with a degree in social education, the ones with title of socio-sanitary assistant.

<sup>20</sup> The gross salary for a full-time socio-sanitary assistant (80% of the professions asked by Municipalities) is around € 1.207 per month, meaning a net salary of around € 940 per month. The last official Italian relative-poverty threshold is € 869 per month, very close to the salary recognized by the National Contract for workers fighting social exclusion. More evident is the paradox with the salary for the labor-reinsertion programme, which is directly under this threshold, as the part-time salary is around € 250 and the full time around € 500 per month. The salary for the basic step towards reinsertion in labor market puts the ex-homeless straight on the social threshold of absolute poverty, which is fixed in € 589 per month

<sup>21</sup> Because of the economic situation, professions such as psychologists, sociologist, trainer and so on are disappearing completely from a formal and official evaluation. But if the same interventions are made through volunteer work, the evaluation skyrockets.

<sup>22</sup> In some NGOs, the majority of health or social assistants are in reality social workers, who accept lower salaries and lack of recognition of their work and job satisfaction just to work.

<sup>23</sup> In the last call-for-tender there were evidence of rough mistakes in counting the direct costs of the structures. As the NGOs are obliged not to overpass a maximum 15% bidding, they are put in budget difficulties. The risk for NGOs is to lose the running and workplaces. The risk for the welfare is to lose experience and competence, while

These problematic situations and structural paradoxes are linked to structural and legislative critical points that seem to relate more to general political and cultural issues than to direct action to fight social exclusion and homelessness. Yet their effects can be significant, and the impact in term of daily difficulties in the structuring of integrated actions can be problematic too. The handling of such “structural power-games” is probably the next step that the local network will have to focus on, in order to keep on building on past success in term of coordination and collaboration at all level between public and private sector that made Turin experience one of most significant at national level.

Torino, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2005