

When homeless people organise

- Exploring the emergence of a user
organisation for homeless people in
Denmark**

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Background

- Research project: Are new social welfare movements emerging?
- Case studies of two Danish organisations:
 - Drug users: DDUU
 - Homeless people: S.A.N.D.

SAND is linked to the shelters – (ETHOS definition)

- 1) rooflessness (without a shelter of any kind)
- 2) **houselessness** (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter)
- 3) living in insecure housing (threatened with exclusion for different reasons)
- 4) living in inadequate housing (in caravans, illegal campsites etc.).

S.A.N.D

- Institutionally linked to shelters for homeless people in Denmark
- Local initiatives in the late 1990s
- Formed in 2001
- Democratic representative structure (spokesmen at the shelters)
- Public support

The aim of S.A.N.D

- **To counteract the causes and the consequences of homelessness:**
- **S.A.N.D. seeks to establish contact to relevant organisations and authorities and seeks to cooperate to ensure a sufficient number of services for homeless persons**
- **S.A.N.D. seeks to strengthen the voluntary work of the users.... – and to improve the quality of this work**
- **S.A.N.D. opposes all forms of discrimination**
- **S.A.N.D. informs about the living conditions of socially vulnerable citizens and seeks to provide a more informative image of their lives**
- **S.A.N.D. seeks to become the mouthpiece of socially vulnerable citizens**

Six policy areas

- Social policy
- Addiction and treatment
- Labour market policy
- Housing and urban development
- Legal rights
- Action plans

Seeking recognition

- **Basically an organisation that seeks co-operation and dialogue...**
- **An organisation which works from within the system and seeks to gain influence through accepted channels of interest mediation**
- **An organisation which seeks to oppose discrimination and provide a more varied image of homeless persons -**

How to explain the emergence of S.A.N.D.?

- **An increased interest in user involvement in the public sector stemming from two different concerns:**
 - **Consumerist philosophy, neoliberal thinking and new public management**
 - **Ideals of grass-root organisation and local democracy**
- **Support from the Ministry of Social Affairs**
 - **Institutional structure of the Danish welfare state provide openings for new interest organisations of social clients**
 - **The right to organise in user councils were inscribed in the Social Service Act**
 - **Facilitation of the user organisation; resources, recognition and organisational support**
 - **Different Ministers of Social Affairs and civil servants have acted like informal allies**

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Explaining the emergence...

- **Support from non-users**
 - Different influential actors in the field who are not external to but rather an integrated *part of* the organisation
 - Influential actors were able to translate the discursive focus on user involvement to a legal right
 - Opened access to the sphere of decision-making, developed the ideas, and supported user organisation in practice
 - Stressed the importance of a democratic organisational structure.
 - Created a room for homeless persons to meet and share experiences across the country
 - Developed an educational programme for representatives at the accommodations
- **The presence of persons who were able to become involved in the formation of the organisation (It is perceived as self-created.... Valued as the result of the homeless persons' own efforts)**

Difficulties in the organisation

- The problem of temporarity
 - the problem of homelessness or drug use as a temporary situation
 - Lack of stability and problems in the lives of the activists
- Limited personal capabilities
- Limited experience with organisation
- Overcoming stigmatisation to become engaged
- Problems maintain a democratic structure

S.A.N.D. and the organisational structure

- The democratic ambitions of a national organisation define the opportunities available
- Sometimes difficult to maintain close contact between regional organisation and user councils at the shelters
- Organisations are vulnerable – ups and downs.... (A lot of stories)
- A lot of energy is invested in running the organisation....

Challenges to the organisations

- Dilemmas of participation
 - Practices of inclusion and exclusion
- The activists' engagement influence the internal democracy
- Employment of professionals or autonomous action?

Good practice – lessons learned

- Programmes of capacity building
- Important to continually develop opportunities for participation of the most marginalised groups
- It takes resources to organise marginalised groups
- What may serve as incentives to engage people...
- Institutional openness – recognition

Importance of S.A.N.D

- A political aspect:
 - Influence on the implementation of policies
 - Represent the interests of homeless people
 - Information
- A social aspect:
 - Self-help and support
 - Social networks
 - Identity and recognition,
 - A free space, without stigmatisation and control

The importance of the organisations

- They open new opportunities for socially excluded groups
- They have the opportunity to influence policy formulation
- They influence the implementation of policies (locally)
- They provide a space interaction and personal development
- To some it becomes a first step out of addiction or homelessness
- They represent some of the most marginalised groups in a corporative system
- They seek to challenge dominant understandings of homelessness and drug use: Claim rights and recognition.
- They may reach groups that authorities can not reach