

# “EMPOWERED” HOMELESS – THE SOCIALLY INCLUDED HOMELESS IN THE LIGHT OF AN ANALYSIS FROM THE INTERACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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*“X: Please, tell me, do you feel excluded in any way, outside the society?  
F: No, I think not. No, because I have buddies, I can get advice. We practically  
live together. There is no problem” (F-WI)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Some fragments of this text were presented and will be published in the publication after the XX Convention of Polish Association of School of Social Work in 2010 in Wrocław.

<sup>2</sup> The quoted statements of the respondents were assigned with appropriate symbols. Every quotation, to ensure the anonymity of the respondents, was marked with a symbol of N1, N2, N3, ..., thus determining individual Speakers. The researcher was assigned with the symbol of X. I am aware of the fact that such symbols assigned to the subjects of the study seem far from the “understanding perspective” adopted by me during the research, however, they proved to be the best solution to avoid, on the one hand determining the respondents with names other than their actual names (I did not want to resolve to it because of strong relationships with the subjects) and, on the other, determining them with nicknames, which could be of a pejorative nature, inducing the Reader in advance to form a specific opinion regarding individual subjects of the study.

## SOCIAL EXCLUDING/INCLUDING THE HOMELESS SEEN FROM THE INTERACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The image of homelessness that emerges out of the analysis based on the research<sup>3</sup> carried out by me is far from defining it as a state of possessing or lacking some features or resources. It does not fit the picture of homelessness understood as a process of decreasing social participation – unless we define participation as fulfillment of maximum achievable socially defined roles for a subject that are at the same time positively evaluated by the society. The homeless respondents are active in their world, which requires a great deal of social knowledge and good organization. This article shows homelessness as an interactive process.<sup>4</sup> It covers specific changes in the identity of the subjects, the social reactions to the subjects, the borders between those who make the world of „theirs“ as opposed to the world of “strangers”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This period covering a time-span of over two years (2006–2008) of accompanying the homeless staying on the streets of Łódź became an almost inexhaustible source of knowledge, one the one hand, due to the fact that it was not only limited to occasional contacts, but it covered all activities undertaken by the homeless, resulting from their daily routine, thereby allowing deep penetration into the reality of the respondents and making it possible to see it somewhat with Their eyes. On the other hand, all the activities and the experience gained then was constructed with the subjects themselves – the homeless – who are the best experts on their situation.

<sup>4</sup> An attempt to redefine the concept commonly appreciated in social pedagogy can be seen in the research conducted by A. Gulczyńska (2005), where a research devoted to social rooting of teenagers made it possible to redefine this concept with the use of interactive concepts generated in the course of the study.

<sup>5</sup> The existence of the world of “theirs” (the homeless) as opposed to the world of “strangers” (the non-homeless) seems to be analogical to the concepts of social worlds introduced to the subject literature by A. Strauss (1975). “(...) the world (...) is an agglomeration of people related by their communication, i.e. a specific universe of a discourse. Regardless of whether its members are close in the spatial dimension or not, they participate in substantial acts of symbolic exchange, and thus they share a certain perspective in the perception of reality” (Denzin, Lindesmith, Strauss, 1975, 469).

The phenomenon of homelessness is therefore a process of continuous change of identity, commenced at the symbolic moment of the loss of „prosperity“ and the emergence of „loneliness“, combined with not having a place of permanent residence. At this stage, we can talk about physical homelessness (non-residence – „roof-lessness“), accompanied by emotional homelessness. As results from the analysis of the subjects’ biographies, the characteristics of emotional homelessness frequently appeared before homelessness in the physical sense. Homeless persons do not identify themselves, physically and emotionally, with the world of those defined as the homeless, with all the baggage of qualities that are foreign to them or that are negatively evaluated. They are located in the „suspension period“<sup>6</sup>, which is characterized by confusion, lack of competence to navigate in the world of „strangers“. They attempt to reconstruct their life, at the same time feeling a stronger or weaker disagreement to connect their life with the world of the homeless.

During the „suspension period“ the homeless are nowhere „at home“. As shown by the analysis, they are recognized neither by their previous world of „theirs“ (aid institutions, passers-by, rail wardens), nor by the world of „strangers“ (the homeless). The difficulty in finding their place is associated with the inability to function in the world they lived in so far, which is accompanied by the need to cope with the problems of the world of „strangers“. With time, the period of suspension induces them to redefine the boundaries between the world of „strangers“ and „theirs“. The difficulties in maintaining hygiene, nutritional needs, growing tension due to not knowing what to do next, the activity of „snipers“<sup>7</sup>, the increase in the role played by alcohol – all of these lead to changes in self-presentation – from

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<sup>6</sup> In order to reflect the atmosphere of the phenomena described by the respondents, the text repeatedly shows the expressions taken directly from their everyday language (after: Strauss – «in vivo codes») – highlighted with the quotation marks (Courier New 10).

<sup>7</sup> “Sniper” – a specific kind of a homeless person’s buddy, one of „theirs“ (coming for the world of the homeless), or a befriended “stranger” (coming from the society); who talks a homeless into drinking alcohol, offering him/her a place to stay (a flat) in exchange for certain “services”.

the role of „the normal“ into the role of „the homeless“<sup>8</sup>. This results in changes in social reaction, and eventually in stronger integration with the world of the homeless, which slowly becomes the world of „theirs“.

The mechanism of changes, leading to closer and closer integration with the world of the homeless, depends on the interactions that the homeless have with various representatives of the world of „strangers“ and the world of „theirs“, where – throughout the time – symbolic boundaries of these worlds are altered.

Such concept of homelessness, emerging as a result of summing up the categories generated in the study and analyzing their interrelationships, seems to be in line with the concept of social exclusion, presented in the literature devoted to this subject, which states that „in every society, always and everywhere, there are people excluded from something due to some or other characteristics, possessed resources or deficits, not taking part in the whole social life, not being involved in everything, choosing this and not another sphere of activity“ (Orłowska, 2005, 21).

According to this approach, we cannot talk about the total social exclusion of the homeless. Every man, even that excluded from certain spheres of social life, is still active in another sphere, or turns to the next one. We should imagine, „the society as a whole filled (split) with a variety of margins, where everyone, somewhere, locally, belongs to some margin, is seen as belonging to it from another perspective, or defines himself/herself as belonging to it. Then, we must recognize that society has no place unclosed <by the logic of marginalization>“ (Witkowski, 2010, 172) A man cut off from the community of “the non-homeless”, thus joins the homeless community,

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<sup>8</sup> A person that has become homeless may choose to resort to one of the possible ways of creating his/her image – self-presentation in the role of “the normal” (“smelling nice, taking care of one’s looks”, “does not look homeless”) and the role of “the homeless” (“dirty, lousy, lying in the street, with gangrene in the leg”). Initially, every subject adopts self-presentation involving the role of “the normal”, and when he/she finds that no help can be enlisted from the social aid institutions, he/she gradually adopts the role of “the homeless”. More information in: Kostrzyńska M. (2010, 54-68).

and therefore we can say that from the perspective of the homeless, it is the rest of the society („we“, and for them „strangers“) that is excluded from their communities. Thus, marginalization, according to L. Witkowski, „affects everybody and concerns everybody as an interactive, inevitable mechanism that will not safeguard anybody from its consequences.“ (ibid, 160).

Social exclusion can be further defined as „a relational process involving a gradual reduction in daily interactions between the subjects and other persons, their access to objectively attainable communities and obtaining there a sense of being empowered.“ (after: Gulczyńska, 2007, 329). Exclusion is understood here as a process of gradual impoverishment of the areas of social participation, rather than a kind of a state or a encountered. It should also be noted that the reasons of exclusion are considered here as reactions of the society to an individual and not as its internal, individual deficits. Sometimes, in this type of „excluding“ interactions there occurs self-exclusion of an individual conducted in order to protect his/her identity. Thus, analogically to the commonly occurring negotiations during social interactions, in a situation of exclusion there is initiated a negotiation process between “the excluded“ and „the excluding“ (ibid, 329). It can be said that exclusion/ marginalization provides not only protection of their identity, but it is also an attempt to create a specific developmental niche „facilitating the process of developing an alternative, aimed at protecting it, which is the only possible space for its existence (...“ (Witkowski, 2010, 171). Marginalization, according to Witkowski, „does not need to be a manifestation of a radical rejection, but simply a way to minimize the gestures of rejection and stigma (...“ (ibid, 171). This strategy allows for the protection, the survival of principles and values (especially when it is a result of a conscious decision).

Understanding a homeless person in terms of interaction makes it possible to see these spheres of life in which he/she turns out to be more socially empowered than many of the representatives of the world of “the normals“. The very survival of the homeless in the new world requires, above all, organizational skills concerning the

spheres of life that are the most essential ones for survival: arrangement of “a roof above the head”, food, sources of income, inter-human relationships.

## “EMPOWERED” HOMELESS” – ORGANIZATION OF LIFE ENSURING SURVIVAL

ARRANGEMENT OF “A ROOF ABOVE THE HEAD”;  
“TO HAVE A PLACE TO COME BACK TO” (N3)

The ‘roofless’ homeless, i.e. those staying outside any social aid scheme provided by the institutions, try to satisfy the need for a place to which you can go back through „domesticating” it. It involves creating a „substitute” of what they could call home; their own place to which the homeless can go back and where he/she feels safe. An abandoned gazebo, attic, trash chute, a special place in the park, at the railway station, or at Plac Wolności<sup>9</sup> – gives a homeless person a substitute of „normality”.

*“(...)today I am homeless, but I feel good about it, I have got used to it. I sleep on stairways, when it is warm I lay ‘cardboard’ around, some blankets somehow I will arrange (...)ooo... yesterday I slept here. Have a look – among these trees. There I laid cardboards, it is my sleeping place there. There, where is this green dome, the smaller one, there, you know, I made for myself a little tunnel, put there some cardboards, at night it is warm, so I slept here. No one comes here... (...)so I hid there: a leather jacket, two sweaters... When we finish this interview, I will go and see if they are not stolen, because I haven’t checked it for a long time. I put them in a foil bag, right, packed them nicely so that they don’t get wet. Because I have no other place ...”(N3)*

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<sup>9</sup> A place in the center of Łódź, “inhabited” by many homeless persons seeking shelter in “the flower-beds”(as they are described by the homeless who stay there), i.e. the bushes around the monument situated in the middle of the square.

A place in the streets, „domesticated” – chosen by the homeless for some reasons, arranged somehow by them, makes a place to which they come back like “to their place”.

*“N1: Why I come back to this square? I don't know is it in the human nature, but in my opinion a man is like a rat... able to get used to anything. Whatever it is, a man will get used to it. Me, for example, somehow... first, something drew me to Fabryczny Dworzec, no, but later I settled in Plac Wolności and a day could not pass by when I would not be there. I had to be there. Sit for a while, smoke a cigarette. Some buddy came around, or an acquaintance... like you, hehe... And this is it (...) And I always would come back to this Plac Wolności, I think because I got used to it. When I was walking, I knew where I was going. Or my feet led me there on their own. Yeaah... was it 6 am or 4 am... right, so many times I was there at night even. At 4 am.... Because there is a 24h shop ... also I managed to earn something.*

*X: ...this is your home...*

*N1: ...Yeaah...”(N1)*

On the other hand, one of the research subjects, having got impatient with the lack of the possibility to change his situation, took all his possessions – composed of a few foil bags – blocked with his own body the door leading to the office of the President of the city, threatening that he will not leave until he gets social housing. In this way, after a few days, he was able to move into a social flat (along with several other homeless people whom he immediately took in).

#### ARRANGING FOR SOMETHING TO EAT – “FROM SOUP TO SOUP”(N6)

A specific rhythm of life led by the homeless staying outside the schemes of social aid institutions is defined by the study participants as the “**day trance**”, which means that they spend all their days almost in the same way. Thus, it may be said that their life takes on the form of a “trance”.

*“And days are always the same... I sit here I sit there..., I ask here I ask there... for me there it is no different... one day from another... it's a cycle... like a trance”(N1)*

The consequence of the “day trance” is the phenomenon of “merging” of the consecutive days, resulting in the fact that the homeless do not pay attention to dates and the passing of time.

The “day trance” is differentiated not only by the place, but also by specific forms of activity (“hangover soup” and “from soup to soup”) which set a certain periodicity in the way of experiencing time, thereby ensuring the survival of the homeless by arranging for a source of food.

Both the first and the second type of activity involves total subordination of the day order to the existing schedule of distributing meals, packages and clothing by different kinds of charity organizations. The homeless show a very high degree of organization in this area. They know exactly where and when there will be a meal served at some of the social aid institutions, and they subordinate all their daily actions according to such schedule.

The “hangover soup” lifestyle is different from the lifestyle called “from soup to soup” in that way that apart from attending all the places where free meals are served, the homeless compulsorily consume alcohol. Therefore, a day cycle of such homeless person takes on the form of a cycle of attending free meals and drinking episodes. An intoxicated homeless, and very often a completely drunk one, goes to dinner (sometimes to several ones), and then continues drinking. The meals are interspersed with acts of alcohol consumption<sup>10</sup>.

In the case of “from soup to soup” it is important for a homeless to appear in the right place at the right time; in order to be given another meal; very often one of several meals consumed on that day. “I eat three, four dinners daily. So you do not eat normally so much at home, no...”(N1)- says one of the research participants.

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<sup>10</sup> Due to this situation a decision was made to give meals only to the homeless who were tested and proved to be sober. When a homeless was intoxicated, a meal was not given to him/her. This method evoked two kinds of reactions among the homeless. On the one hand, some of them felt discriminated and criticized the lack of support for alcohol-addicts; on the other, some of them thought it was a good solution that would encourage the homeless to give up drinking. This method was abandoned (at least at most of the meals distribution centers), but the personnel working in the aid centers providing meals for the homeless still possess the skill of recognizing when a homeless is drunk.



This cycle is best described by N6:

*"...well, the people plan their day in a way of, well, going to all those charity organizations, in order to get by throughout the day – when at one place there is breakfast distributed at 9:00 am – there they are; if at 1 pm there is dinner somewhere – in Żeromskiego Street, or somewhere, simply – they are here; if the dinner is given in Pasaż Schillera – they are in Pasaż Schillera. They have a map where there are some aid centers, and so they simply go, and so the whole day round, and they can bring many things home... and so day by day. Because they have something to eat; they can wangle something to drink, and so the days go by and by..."(N6)*

It is enough to have a good "schedule", plan the time well, and no "offer of the day" will be skipped, and one can even take some food home "and the day goes by". All these findings demonstrate their extraordinarily advanced day organization.

To be able to further „improve“ this organization, and thus not miss any of the possible meals, there occurs a peculiar division of responsibilities among the homeless. When meals are given at two different locations in Łódź, at the same or similar time, it would be impossible for a homeless to reach both of these places and so he/she loses one of the possible chances to receive help. Therefore, the homeless organize themselves in „couples“ to be able to divide „obligations“ between themselves. One person will go to one place, the second person will go to another one.

*"So that they organize it so... these are mostly married couples, or couples living in concubinage, and simply they so organize it in such a way, that simply for example on one day they will go here – they will have these two centers covered, on the next so.... So they simply have this week overlapping... on Saturday they usually solicit so that they have on Sunday... And starting from Monday it starts again..."(N6)*

This cooperation is observed not only between spouses, or the homeless living in concubinage, but also between two previously unrelated

homeless who enter into an agreement concerning the division of responsibilities in order to then share the accumulated resources. This division of responsibilities covers not only going „from soup to soup,“ but also trying to get help from passers-by on the street. During the course of the study I spent a lot of time on Plac Wolności, or in other places – „domesticated“ by the homeless, and I observed the whole system of signs that the homeless showed to each other, „spread“ in critical points of the square and constantly maintaining eye contact with each other. The first selected some person, approached this person and in such a way „prepared the ground“ for his/her partner.

#### ARRANGING FOR A SOURCE OF INCOME – “WANDERING AND EARNING”(N1)

A source of income, proven and „recommended“ by the homeless, is begging. „And so I wandered and earned“(N1) – says one of the study participants, which, in principle, perfectly describes this way of life. It depends on approaching people in the streets, telling them the story of the homeless’ lives, and consequently – asking for support, either financial or in the form of shopping.

However, not every homeless is capable of begging. The easiest way we can divide the homeless people according to this category is to differentiate them into those who can beg, having no qualms about approaching passers-by and asking them for food or money; those who can enter into such interaction only when they are intoxicated, using alcohol as a supporting factor, softening their own resistance to such activity and often necessary for them to make a decision to go for it; and those who – for various reasons – (sense of shame, courage, dignity) cannot beg.

Begging, in order to bring certain results, requires the use of certain tactics that express the extent of interactions with the „others“. The homeless develop the most effective ways, allowing them to reach their goals. One can therefore beg in one the following manners:

- ◆ “at houses”, meaning that they go „from house to house”, asking for food, and more rarely for money;

*“Well, there were many times when a man went... and begged... in the area of detached houses... you go from a house to a house... people open doors.... could I ask for something to eat?... a lady looks, well... you don't have a job... well, no job... you are homeless... well, I am homeless.... are you hungry... well, wait a moment... And so one can collect food in such a way. One person will give some sausage, bread, tinned food, so I did not go hungry, I somewhat got by...”(N4)*

- ◆ “at shops”, meaning that they spend time in front of a shop in order to realize their goal there:

*“There were such times when I stood in front of a shop... I will tell you... and I asked people... excuse me, for example, I came up to some person... could you buy me some bread, because I am hungry... and you really want some bread... because people, like people... and you really don't want to buy beer. Cross my heart that I want some money for bread and something to the bread... Well, you know, something to the bread rather rarely, because I am a pensioner... but well I will buy you some bread. Another person bought me something to the bread, and so a man carried it with himself and ate...”(N4)*

- ◆ “culturally”, meaning that they behave in a well-mannered way, because – as it was stated by the participants of the study – it is not important where one begs, but in what way;

*“I, when I come up to a person... always have to say excuse me... And was it so .... you remember how I came up to you ...? I always say that... I have a hearty request ... and I will not be angry whether you will give me something or not... I don't have enough for this or that, can you buy me... and usually people understand something like this. And if there are some stinkers... hi, give 3 zlotys... well... I would not give myself... And, save God, he could get a blow in his yap... ..hehe...”(N1)*

Besides begging, gathering things turns out to be a good source of income. It consists in wandering across the entire city and searching the streets, garbage cans, baskets, so as to collect cans, scrap metal, or bottles (for sale), or to gather for one's own needs discarded food,

clothing, useful hardware<sup>11</sup>. It appears that often very it is a good „source of income“.

*“Now I prefer to go there to collect some cans or something, and damn somehow lead a life. (3s) People now throw away such things that it is really out of my mind”(N2)*

*“I will tell you a stupid case... once I didn't have anything to eat... I was hungry ... I think for three days I didn't eat anything... And so I went out with my rucksack, I say to myself maybe some cans I will find and I will sell them.... I come around to some damn rubbish heap, I see that people threw away so... SO MUCH FOOD... I only looked if it was edible... so it was edible... fresh... so I took this bag, looked up and I say thanks Jesus... Because I was so hungry, that I would eat a cow”(N2)*

Another way to obtain food, and thereby ensure the survival is „guarding cars“, which once again creates the opportunity for a homeless to interact with the society.

„Guarding the car“ is a form of earning the living by providing „forced“ favors for the potential customer. A homeless waits in the parking lot for the oncoming „clients“ who want to park their cars there. He approaches them offering to watch their car so that „nothing could happen to it.“ In return, of course, compensation is expected after the completion of the task. A „customer“ of a homeless person is aware of the risks that the car will be exposed to, if he does not agree to it being watched, and in this way „the business is booming“ (as stated by the homeless who earn in this way).

*“I try for example... there comes a car... excuse me, boss, should watch a car... if yes yes, if no very sorry... always well-mannered and that's it...”(N2)*

Black jobs market is another place where a homeless, finding „an under-the-table job“, ensures himself/herself the „survival“. This is

<sup>11</sup> This leads to a situation when a homeless who wants to buy something counts its value as the value of a number of bottles or cans that he/she would need to collect. For instance “coffee” has the value of 30 bottles. (see: E. Bogosian, “Sex, drugs and rock and roll”; a play directed by J. Orłowski.

where it comes to interesting interactions between the homeless and other workers and the homeless and the employer. Work in „an under-the-table job „, very often allows the homeless to survive (especially if it is difficult for them to find legal work), but also complicates the situation. Despite many years of work they remain deprived of the right to a pension.

“And it appears simply that he worked here, but illegally, on some or other conditions, and it appears that being let’s say 65 he doesn’t have enough for the pension, because he worked let’s assume 30 years, but he worked illegally, because he needed money for vodka and he worked for vodka, and for the pension it appeared that he worked only two years. He is exhausted after working for so many years, but has no documentation. And looks where to find these years”(N6)

Despite numerous difficulties associated with calculating premiums and the right to pensions, the homeless give examples of many benefits arising from taking on “an under the table job“. A warehouse complex situated in one of the streets in Łódź provides for some of the municipal homeless not only a source of food (they pick up vegetables and fruit that begin to go off), but also a source of income (then they can sell them in markets and streets of the city).

*“(...) I used to go to Z., because there I have good connections in these wholesale companies... There work my buddies. So I have no problem there. If I need tomatoes, nectarines, tangerines, or whatever yyy... It is no problem for me. They will always pack me a foil bag, here you are, so from time to time I will bring them a half... just... Because I will not hide, you know, that I live off it, because when I get more, then I will sell it, because I will not eat it by myself...”(N3)*

## ARRANGING FOR HUMAN RELATIONS ("THEIRS" – "STRANGERS") – "ONE CAN COMMUNICATE WITH EVERYONE"(N4)

Entering into interactions, but also taking up any activity (described above), requires from a homeless understanding of the crucial role played by self-presentation adopted by him/her (by choosing one

of the two symbolically available roles – „the normal“ and „the homeless“)<sup>12</sup>.

Initially, the person entering the route of homelessness always adopts self-presentation as „the normal“ (cannot be recognized as a „typical homeless“). He/she is homeless out of self-definition, but at the same time there occurs the lack of fulfillment of social standards resulting in social classification into the category of homelessness. However, the time spent on the streets, the lack of support from authorized institutions (because aid is directed mainly to the stereotypical homeless) may lead to a gradual move into the role of „the homeless“ (in line with the stereotype existing in the society of someone “dirty, stinky, lousy”(G-WI), simply “someone from the margin, the Beelzebub”(B-WI).

Then, it turns out that appropriate manipulation of the assumed role allows the homeless to obtain the desired results. However, this requires proper „reconnaissance“ skills (as the study participants say), to adopt self-presentation according to the circumstances and persons with whom they is dealing.

The adoption of the appropriate self-presentation image proves to be working, for example, in relations with the SOK<sup>13</sup>. These relations may take on two forms, depending on whether the homeless turn to self-presentation involving the role of „the homeless“ or the role of „the normal“.

Self-presentation as „the homeless“ brings the relationship between the homeless and the rail wardens down to continual „driving the homeless away“ from the train stations.

*“Because, as I see here, you know... well especially here at Dworzec Fabryczny right, because I often come here... I don't, you know, understand it at all... And how, you know, the authorities treat the homeless... well... they drive them away... so a homeless he is, well, cold... so he comes to a railway station, right, and wants*

<sup>12</sup> A criterion differentiating self-presentation is the level of fulfilling the expectations of the society attributed to the fulfillment of a given social role.

<sup>13</sup> SOK – Railway Security Service.

*to get warm a little... just simply... or drink some tea... And this City Police, these rail wardens they drive them away, you know, I don't know, for me it is not comprehensible. To do so... Because this rail warden thinks that this railway station is his private place... A railway station is for people to come and sit for a while, right... Maybe this is also the fault of these homeless, that they misbehave... Maybe so... because I don't stay so much at the railway station you know... I even heard that they are driven away you know... They are so treated as... you know... unnecessary in the society. Such railway warden if he could, he would shoot this homeless... I had such impression. This is not good ..."(N3)*

*"A: AND THEY CHASE YOU EVERYWHERE LIKE A PIG. They drive you away from the railway station... you don't sit there for more than five minutes and you have to go away.*

*X: ...why do they drive away?*

*A: ...BECAUSE STINKS...*

*X: ...who drives away?*

*A: ...railway guards, police ...but rather railway guards...*

*X: ...where to?*

*A: ...outside ...go lose your smell they say ...so... and you come back, sit for 5 minutes and again they take you away ...so you have that ...I don't know how it is in other cities ...but here it is so... (3s)  
The station is closed at 11:00 pm and then you have nothing... so...*

*X: ...what happens then with the homeless... when the station is closed...?*

*A: ... so most of them when now it is warm, they sleep there on the grass..."(N1)*

On the other hand, when a rail warden is dealing with a homeless in the role of "the normal", he may appear very sensitive to his/her problems. Many things can be then "arranged", for instance the possibility of spending the night on the train, storing the belongings in the place assigned by the rail guard. "It's enough to be decently dressed, shaved and smell nice..." Thus, self-presentation differentiates the kinds of social relations to a homeless person.

*"So... for example Dworzec Fabryczny railway station – I slept in carriages... Talked with rail wardens and I will tell you that when a*

*man is presentable, when he is dressed, shaved, neat and not looking like a drunkard, he has a lot of chances.*

*Because it is so that rail wardens, are like police... they do not let to sleep in carriages, and when I was wandering, all these bundles with me, but I was taking care of my looks, so there where I went I washed myself, shaved, changed my clothes, washed them... left them to dry, then I put them on... It was July then, it suited me that summer... So I slept for a week in Fabryczny, a week in Kaliski... there are security guards, so well with those guards a man could talk... so that these bundles, all these clothes I threw to their office, and they had there a night-duty, so they even woke you up... so can be said, so let's say a man went to sleep at 12 am, and so they had a duty until 6 am, so they woke the man up... and a man got up well-rested"(N4)*

It is therefore enough to choose the right self-presentation to manage relationships in a manner beneficial to the homeless.

Very clear manipulation of the assumed role takes also place in a relation the homeless – the welfare institutions. Here, the definitions of „a homeless person in need“ maintained by each party show a clear discrepancy. A homeless in the role of „the normal“ turns out not to fulfill the expectations consistent with the definition of „a homeless“ – „he/she does not look like a homeless“, and therefore he/she is not considered as a potential recipient of aid afforded to the homeless<sup>14</sup>. This situation reveals the lack of ideas in the society of how to help the homeless population – from the homeless playing the role of „the normal“ the society expects adoption of the symbolic attributes of the world of the homeless; and from the homeless – the

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<sup>14</sup> «D: I talked to a sister ...there is in X street... there are Mother Theresa nuns... There are such homeless... real homeless that do not want to stay on the shelter, because he does not suit there, because he likes to for example drink... because they do not want to keep there people who are physically capable and look neat. I was there, cross my heart. I talked to a sister.... Sir... you are capable of working... ...I we don't need you... why you can go to work, earn, for a month, and get a flat for yourself... We take those from the margin, that lie in the street, stinky, with gangrene in their legs.... lousy, dirty.... And there is nothing wrong going on with you... you are clean, neat... But sister... I say, here I would like to stay for a while.... It's not possible..."(N4).



behavior representative for the world of „the normals“. The natural consequence is, therefore, „a difficulty in reading out the expectations of the society“ towards the homeless and, consistent with this, „the lack of confidence on the part of the homeless.“ This is one of the reasons why the homeless, who wish to enlist help, adopt the appropriate role of „the homeless“. In that way, acting in line with the stereotype, they can reach their goals.

As a result of the contradicting expectations described above, there occurs a phenomenon when the homeless use specific tactics towards the representatives of the world of „the normals“ applied in order „to put the society to a test.“ A homeless checks whether the representative of the society, with whom he/she interacts, does not apply tactics meant to degrade him/her into the sole role of a homeless person. He/she will allow to establish an interaction on the level of personal identity<sup>15</sup> as soon as it turns out that no such degradation takes place.

*„I was even surprised at you, that you came here, even not... then you didn't know that I did time... But later when we sat and talked... another would have jumped up and run to the door... And you didn't... and you didn't... I told you so everything ...so I can say I told you my whole life... Because I am not ashamed of it. Because as I see it... you don't want to tolerate... no or me... don't tolerate and that's it. And when I, I don't know, well... in some way when you like me, so you will tolerate me and you will talk to me and you will not avoid me... YOU WILL NOT AVOID ME and I, you know, come to other people with open attitude. But when some people are different than I am so just excuse me... sorry ... you don't want to like me, YOU DON'T WANT TO DEAL WITH ME, SO DON'T DEAL WITH ME... save God...“(N2)*

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<sup>15</sup> E. Goffman (1979) introduces a division of identity consisting of three categories: ego-identity, i.e. private self-identification, inaccessible to other people during interactions; personal identity, self-presentation directed outside, accessible to one's family and friends; and social identity, formed by the image of what we are and what we want to be, accessible by everyone, even strangers (after: Granosik, 2007).

## THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE WORLD OF „EMPOWERED HOMELESS”

The above-presented picture of an empowered homeless seems to undermine his/her need to enlist the help of a social worker. A homeless skillfully maneuvers in the world which only superficially appears to be foreign and unfavorable. In fact, when the space is domesticated, it acts like any other, serving to satisfy the needs and continual crossing the borders. The levels shown above where we could observe perfect social functioning of the homeless make us see them rather in the light of social inclusion than exclusion, often suggesting the possibility of referring to them as „social entrepreneurs” (as they call themselves). What is then, in this context, the role of a social worker? To find his place in the above-presented world of the homeless, it is necessary to come back for a moment to the concepts explaining the process of social exclusion through the perspective of interactions. One such concept is that proposed by Z. Bauman (1995, 79-80), suggesting the existence of the social process of generating „strangers”, occurring as a result of attempts to organize the world, by dividing it, sorting, classifying, and „pushing,” „strangers” into the situation of ambiguity. And all of this to introduce a little order in such a rapidly changing world, full of ambivalence, ambiguity and differences. „Like most of the opposites constituting the world order in which we live, and our life in this world, the opposition between friends (those that are inside) and enemies (those that are outside) is natural. Only by the condensation of what they are not (or what they cannot be, or they will never admit that they are) into the counter-image of enemies, friends can tell what they really are, what they want to be seen as by others. The opposition friends/enemies separates the truth from the deceit, good from evil, beauty from ugliness. It also lets us distinguish between what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, what is right and what is wrong, what is in good taste and what is in bad taste. The opposition makes the world legible. Dispels doubts. Allows us to decide what to do. Ensures taking the right decision. Facilitates selection (...)” (Kantowicz, 2006, 14). Society „arranges” the world according to its will, introducing the

order. However, „a stranger“ that appears in this world represents everything that is unplanned, unexpected, embarrassing. Thus, the emergence of „otherness“ destroys that cherished social order. In order to restore it, it is necessary to stigmatize „the stranger“, isolate, exclude from the „ideal“ world.

Consequently, referring to the concept of „strangers“, the process of assimilation will involve granting „the strangers“ the right of self-definition, taking the responsibility for their own lives, protection against overt stigma. Its role is therefore to provide equal opportunity to apply for and acquire the desired value. Nevertheless, we must be aware of the contradictions that are revealed during this process. „On one hand, the superiority of one culture over another and generosity and good will of the rulers, on the other hand, the possibility of putting the blame on <the disabled> for the fate from which they cannot get out or do not want to get out. If they do not subdue themselves to the process of assimilation, they will admit their guilt and helplessness, and they may return to the group of those “stigmatized–excluded” (Kantowicz, 2006: 15). Social inclusion should thus not only lead to socio-cultural assimilation/integration, but above all to breaking the stereotypes of social participation of these „unwanted“ in favor of the acceptance of their differences, perceiving the beauty of diversity, and finally appreciation of the opportunities resulting from diversity. It is this space that can be utilized by a social worker who resigns from enforcing his/her help on a homeless who gets by in a perfect way, and instead takes up the task of raising the awareness of the society, showing the capabilities and potentials of a homeless, imaging the ambiguity of reality, stimulating the reflection on the governance of the world and the human existence resulting from such governance and leading to it (Kantowicz, 2006, 15).

Any action taken by a social worker – an intermediary between the world of „theirs“ (the homeless) and the world of „strangers“ – should therefore embrace an individual, structural and interactive level of human life. Working on a structural level, aimed at social inclusion, should include not only working with the homeless themselves, but

also with the society. It should involve creating job opportunities, and, hence a chance for the homeless to earn their living and housing needs. On the other hand, the work at the interactive level would focus on being with the homeless people. This primarily boils down to trying to balance the relationship between a homeless and the social worker accompanying him/her. In this relationship, there occurs a specific transfer, exchange and mutual participation, and so it results in supporting the development of a homeless. To accompany means to be with him/her, be near, be close enough in order to, at a particular time, be „useful“. However, this time must be clearly indicated by the interested parties themselves – i.e. the homeless – according to their own needs, rather than as a result of the social worker’s perception about his/her presence in their world. A homeless, being an expert in his/her life, has the full right to co-negotiate the importance attributed to the action taken, to take an active part in the construction of the undertaken activity, or it would be better to say – to play a decisive role, which sets the direction and intensity of such activities. A social worker accompanying the homeless stays in their shadow in order to be close, and act as soon as the need arises (in scope of mediation in certain relationships, advice, support, understanding, protection of rights, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the homeless begins to participate in this sphere of life, where their vision, an idea of the world, is not arbitrarily denied and isolated. All of the above-described forms of activity undertaken by the homeless prove that they are characterized by a high degree of organization and that the realization of one’s own vision is possible, even when it does not fit into the one proposed by the „majority“. What is more, they show that we – the non-homeless people – appear ourselves to be excluded from those areas where the homeless are the only experts. We are therefore not less excluded from the activity of the homeless people than they are from the activity attributed to the „normals“. What is left to do for a social worker when dealing

with a homeless person as described above? It seems that the most appropriate form of assistance will be the social support of a homeless in the struggle to maintain, at any cost, the interactively constructed substitutes of a normal life.

## RÉSUMÉ

### LES «SDF» «AUTONOMISÉS» – L'INCLUSION SOCIALE DES SDF À LA LUMIÈRE DE LA PERSPECTIVE INTERACTIONNELLE

L'intervention a pour but de présenter l'analyse du phénomène de désinsertion sociale des personnes sans domicile fixe de la perspective interactionnelle. Cette analyse découvre le processus des négociations continues qui interviennent lors des interactions sociales entre les «exclus» et les «excluants».

La personne sans domicile fixe exclue de certaines sphères de la vie peut être en même temps active dans d'autres sphères, ce qui ne nous autorise pas de voir sa position dans la catégorie de l'exclusion sociale totale.

La recherche participative a permis à l'auteur de faire connaissance des sans domicile fixe qui mènent des activités quotidiennes leur assurant la survie et faisant preuve des capacités d'organisation pour trouver un abri, des sources de revenus, des vivres, ainsi que d'organisation des relations interpersonnelles («les siens» – «les autres»).

Dans cette perspective, une personne sans domicile fixe se montre en tant qu'individu actif, organisé, bien ancré dans la réalité dans laquelle il est amené à fonctionner. On pourrait donc poser la question: Où se situe le rôle du pédagogue social accompagnant les SDF? Dans le contexte des SDF «inclus socialement» il s'agit davantage de leur apporter un soutien dans des aspects de la vie où leur «pouvoir» et le sentiment de «pouvoir agir» sont perturbés.

Les SDF savent bien indiquer ces aspects-là car ce sont eux qui connaissent le mieux leur situation, leurs besoins, leurs projets de vie. Il s'agit donc de les accompagner, de les suivre, au lieu de leur dire quoi faire, et de faire à leur place. Il est important de savoir les écouter et d'essayer de les supporter dans les activités qui leur donnent de la chance d'entrer dans des interactions quotidiennes non seulement dans le monde des siens mais également dans le monde des autres.

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