

Methodologies to support the implementation, in the municipality of Évora (Portugal), of prevention and social protection policies aimed at the Homeless: An experience of collaborative action-research between civil society and university.

Maria da Saude Baltazar

Universidade de Évora y Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciencias Sociais (CICS.NOVA).

Marcos Olimpio dos Santos

Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciencias Sociais (CICS.NOVA).



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Abstract. The article intends to present for appreciation and debate, a set of action-research methodologies, with a view to supporting prevention and social protection measures when working with vulnerable groups, namely homeless people. Based on an experience between the university and civil society, collaborative practices and skills to be mobilized by professionals who intervene in these publics, in the municipality of Évora (Portugal) are highlighted. It is intended, to provide professionals with knowledge with a view to qualifying their work with vulnerable groups, in a context of an integrated production of knowledge and practices between academics and technicians, who develop intervention work on the homeless.

Keywords: Homeless People, Action-research, Social protection and prevention strategies; Vulnerable Groups.

Summary: 1. Introduction; 2. Method adopted, techniques used and classification of the research; 3. Homelessness: brief notions on a multidimensional problem; 4. Strategic regulations and entities involved in the intervention in SHP; 4.1. Supranational level; 4.2. National; 4.3 Regional and subregional; 5. Homelessness in a changing context: the perspective of the sociology of action; 5.1 Context in transformation as a reinforcement of complex social problems; 5.2 Sociology of action (action-research) as a response to Homelessness; 6. The IN_Visibility Intervention: a response in Portugal to SHP; 6.1 Background and presentation of NPISA Évora; 6.2 Area of implementation of the IN_Visibility Intervention; 7. Collaboration experience between the University of Évora and the Civil Society: a methodological platform for action-research aimed at the SHP; 7.1. Work to be carried out by the team of the University of Évora; 7.2. Methodology adopted (in the collaborative experience); 8. Conclusions; 9. Acknowledgements; 10. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

The definition of "homeless" has provoked heated debate (Fitzgerald, Shelly and Dail, 2001; Zenei- di-Henry, 2002; Brousse, 2005; Damon, 2008; Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Rullac, 2012; Aldeia, 2012; O'Sullivan et al., 2020), and there is still no consensus on the concept of People Without Homes (PWH) or "homelessness". The pathological individualization and the quantitative perspective are the main guidelines in the study of homelessness.

These approaches, although different, are complementary and start from the materialization of the presence of the phenomenon constructed by the research itself. It is a research process that can lead to the invisibility of alternative contexts and even to the denial of other realities to be studied. These absences are revealed either by the superficiality of the "big statistical trends" of the PWH, without access to the different ways of thinking and acting that characterize them, or by highlighting the individual causes of the HSPs, when this phenomenon also derives from structural reasons (Aldeia, 2012).

Thus, one of the first challenges of these studies is the identification of the categories included in the definition - who is "homeless"? And consequently, the way in which the object of study is defined conditions the results obtained. If in the different approaches there is a common situation of need (housing, social ties, money, health, etc.) in which they live, there is also difficulty in identifying the causes of the phenomenon. Whether reviewing the structural aspects or individual vulnerabilities related to the phenomenon of homelessness, or prioritizing the methodological practices mobilized by researchers and practitioners involved in PWH (Tosi, 2010; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Speak, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2020; Consoli and Meo, 2020), the study of this phenomenon is considered to be of the utmost relevance at present. The research conducted, namely by the European Observatory on Homelessness since 1991, is very revealing of the progress of studies on the phenomenon of homelessness, but also of its limitations in contributing to a solid basis for the development of future research on the subject (Edgar and Doherty, 2010; Van Heerden, Proietti and Iodice, 2022).

These advances were also translated into research that led to the creation of a European definition of homelessness and residential exclusion, accepted in many European countries -this is the Portuguese case- (and not only), although it is subject to adaptations by national governments (Busch-Geertsema, 2010).

This article is based on the definition of PWH adopted in the National Strategy for the Integration of People Experiencing Homelessness (ENIPSSH)¹, which considers that homelessness should not be assumed as a condition of a person's life.

This is a situation that may correspond to a certain phase in a person's life and that tends to be transitory in that person's life. Thus, a person is considered to be homeless (living in a public space, housed in an emergency shelter or precariously located) or unsheltered (living in temporary housing), regardless of nationality, racial or ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and state of physical and mental health. The (complex) social problem of homelessness has become a notable concern on the agenda of international organizations and national public authorities, in particular on the part of the European Union (EU) and national states such as Portugal. Under the slogan of a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee presented an action program following COVID-19, the priorities of which were aimed at effectively influencing national public policies, particularly on the part of the European Union (EU) and national states such as Portugal. Under the slogan of a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee presented an action program following COVID-19, whose established priorities aimed to have an effective impact on EU policies. One of these priorities focuses on inclusion, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups, which are also the most affected in the current context, especially the PWH. The European Platform to Combat Homelessness² illustrates the commitment of the European institutions, EU governments and civil society to initiate ways of working together to combat homelessness. While the vulnerability of these people tends to be exacerbated in the context of the pandemic and the economic cost of Russia's war in Ukraine, as seen by human development setbacks in virtually all countries (UNDP, 2022) and in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (UNDP and OPHI, 2022), the development of intervention strategies on HRH has been a recurrent concern of several organizations and civil society movements in recent years. According to official data, released by the Executive Nucleus of the ENIPSSH, for the year 2018 in mainland Portugal 6,044

¹ In portuguese: Estratégia Nacional para a Integração das Pessoas em Situação de Sem-Abrigo (ENIPSSA) – Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 107/2017, de 25 de julho.

² Submitted on the 21st of June of 2011 in the Conference held in Lisbon during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and which led to the signing of "The Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform to Combat Homelessness"

PWH were identified, having increased in 2021 to 9,604³.

Faced with this reality, in Portugal, with the participation of central government bodies (especially the Government and the Assembly of the Republic), local authorities and social economy organizations (non-profit institutions), measures have been established to combat this problem, which has been increasing in the last decade, as in the case of Évora. This municipality is located in the Alentejo region and is where the project discussed in this article is being developed. In this context, a project called "IN_Visibility" intervention was initiated in the municipality of Évora, with the participation of the University of Évora (through the Interdisciplinary Center of Social Sciences - CICS.NOVA.UÉvora). The participation of a team from the University of Évora in the intervention on a complex social problem presented the representatives of the academy with theoretical, methodological and practical challenges. This experience of collaboration between academia and civil society, the results of which are described in this paper, has as its objective: to make available for appreciation and debate a set of methodologies oriented towards the knowledge and intervention in PWH, which contributes to promote the collaboration in strategies of social protection and prevention of a vulnerable group. In addition, it aims, within the scope of the so-called integrated production of knowledge, to contribute to the recognition of the role of Higher Education Institutions in the qualification of professionals working in the field of community intervention and of those who are still in academic training but who, in the near future, will enter the labour market to provide quality services to groups of people with disabilities of professionals working in the field of community intervention and of those who are still in academic training but who, in the near future, will enter the labour market to provide quality services to vulnerable groups.

The results obtained in the experience, through the action-research methodology (detailed below), are presented in the following points. A brief definition of homelessness as a multidimensional problem is taken as a starting point, to then systematize the strategic regulations and entities involved in the intervention in PWH. Excerpt written from reference texts and descriptive documentation (strategic documents), aligned with the ENIPSSH. Homelessness in a changing context: the perspective of the sociology of action, which explains the justification for the study from the perspective of this special sociology, operationalized through the theory of change. The "IN_Visibility" Intervention includes a brief description of the intervention area and characterization. The presentation of the activities that make up the initiative, detailing Activity 4, with the participation of a team of researchers from the University of Évora in charge of conducting a study on indicators of vulnerability and social risk for homelessness.

This contribution from the University of Évora is approached at a point where it describes the set of methodologies aimed at knowledge and intervention in relation to the PWH, as well as other vulnerable groups and, in addition, reveals the specificity of the work to be developed by sociology graduates, as future professionals in this field of intervention, from the perspective of sociology of action of the work to be developed by sociology graduates, as future professionals in this field of intervention, from the perspective of the sociology of action. Finally, the Conclusions recapitulate the most relevant inferences and leave clues for further research on the topic addressed at the points designated for this purpose.

2. Method adopted, techniques used and classification of the study

Following the formulation of the problem to be addressed and once the objectives to be achieved have been established, as indicated above, the procedures used to collect, process and analyse the information are clarified, while specifying the action research profile, which is systematized in the following table (Table 1), which is framed within the following framework qualitative method, which consists of using research procedures on objects of study that require descriptions and non-numerical analysis of a certain phenomenon (Guerra, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 2008).

³ For more information, access <https://www.enipssa.pt/documentacao>: i) Inquérito de caracterização das pessoas em situação de sem abrigo–31 dezembro 2018– Dados; ii) Inquérito de caracterização das pessoas em situação de sem abrigo –31 dezembro 2021– Dados.

Table 1. Clarifications regarding research on action-research methodologies for PWH [Own elaboration, adapted from Creswell, 2014; Hughes and Tarrant, A. (2019); Merriam and Tisdell (2016); Alonso (2016); Flick (2009); Gerhardt and Silveira (2009); Guerra, 2014]

Criteria Theoretical classification	Classes Modality	Meaning
Objectives /purposes	Descriptive	In order to carry out a detailed investigation, with the collection of information on the subject referred to in the title of this table, through collection techniques for subsequent processing and analysis.
	Explanatory	Because it consists of deepening the descriptive research, with the purpose of justifying the factors underlying the emergence of the object of study.
Technical procedures/means of investigation /data collection	Bibliographic	Constitute a research using as sources books, articles and other texts of scientific character already published in the parts of the article: i) Homelessness: brief notions about a multidimensional; ii) Strategic regulations and entities involved in the intervention in PWH; iii) Homelessness in a changing context: the perspective of the sociology of action; iv) The intervention "IN_Visibility": a response in Portugal to SHP; v) Experience of collaboration between the University of Evora and the Civil Society: a methodological platform for action-research aimed at SHP; vi) The "IN_Visibility" intervention: a response in Portugal to SHP; v) Experience of collaboration between the University of Evora and the Civil Society: a methodological platform for action-research aimed at SHP.
	Documentary	Why, in addition to bibliographic research, it was necessary to resort to widely accessible sources, such as texts from different agencies and public entities, newspapers, magazines and pages available on social networks.
Analysis techniques	Content analysis	The processing of data collected from various sources was required, namely, texts of a very varied nature, such as articles selected through a bibliographic review, and having been carried out throughout the following stages: i) Pre-analysis, ii) Exploration of the material, and iii) Processing of the results obtained and interpretation.
Approach/Shape to address the problem	Qualitative	To the extent that aims to deepen the understanding of the selected phenomenon, without being concerned with quantitative or statistical representativeness.
Purpose /nature	Basic	Because it does not generate concerns about how the results obtained can be used later. Therefore, it aims to provide a systematic and deep vision of the research problem to facilitate the search for explanations, logical conclusions, as well as contributing to expand the frontiers of knowledge.
Development over time	Longitudinal research. Retrospective understanding.	Because it consists of performing an analysis of the information collected during a certain period of time, in this case with particular incidence since July 2020, the date on which the collaboration protocol was signed which constitutes the Centre for Planning and Intervention of Homeless People of Evora.

Source: Own elaboration, adapted from Creswell, 2014; Hughes and Tarrant, A. (2019); Merriam and Tisdell (2016); Alonso (2016); Flick (2009); Gerhardt and Silveira (2009); Guerra, 2014.

As it is a research methodology aimed at improving the practice in the different fields of action, this experience focuses on the preparation phase of the study development. For Santos and Baltazar (2017), this action-research approach enhances the results obtained in what is done and the training, both at the institutional level and of the professionals involved in the intervention aimed at PWH.

It is a type of research based on a spiral of cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection (Trilla, 1998), which in this article corresponds to the production of knowledge about the phenomenon under study, identifying collaborative practices and skills to mobilize, based on the contextualization and identification of the specificities of the programmed intervention on the PWH. Intervention that presupposes a developed, contrasted and scientifically examined argumentation and that is prepared with this research experience to present a set of collaborative methodologies of reflection and debate.

After clarifying the methodology used, explaining the method, techniques and types of research, we present the results of the application of bibliographic and documentary research, which allowed

us to advance with methodological proposals (already previously applied by the authors), and which are presented as practices. Collaborations for the present discussion on the PWH, in the following point, with the objective of presenting the Supranational, National, Regional and Subregional contextualization that supports the implementation at the local level of prevention and social protection policies aimed at the PWH.

3. Homelessness: brief notions on a multidimensional problem

Since humans became sedentary and built the first settlements, there have been people who could be considered homeless.

The approval of the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 reinforced the responsibility of the public authorities to combat, among other things, this problem, which nevertheless continues to persist and exacerbate at certain times and in certain places.

This problem raises several questions that it is essential to clarify in this text, namely: what is the meaning of homelessness? What are the factors at the origin of the phenomenon? What measures have been considered by public entities and non-profit organizations, with an emphasis on Portugal? The answers to these questions are presented below, following what appears in the introduction on homelessness.

The PWH are those who, regardless of their nationality, racial or ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and physical and mental health, are in any of the following conditions: i) Homeless, living in a public space, in an emergency shelter or in a precarious location, and ii) Homeless, being in temporary housing intended to accommodate people who do not have access to permanent housing and that favours their insertion. (adapted from ENIPSSH; Social Development Department, n.d.).

The factors at the origin of the phenomenon (also considered as risk factors) can be broken down into: i) Causes, ii) Vulnerability factors and iii) Triggering mechanisms (Comissão Europeia, 2013).

Regarding the measures that have been considered by public entities and non-profit organizations, specifically in Portugal, they are systematized in ENIPSSH 2017-2023, which includes three lines of intervention, which aim to promote knowledge of the phenomenon of homelessness, information, sensitization and education, enhancing an intervention that promotes the integration of PWH, as well as coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

4. Strategic regulations and entities involved in the intervention in PWH

The complex social problem of PWH has been gaining prominence as it has been placed on the political and media agendas and in various non-profit organizations. This happens in a world conditioned by political, economic, social, technological and environmental driving forces whose dynamics result in a world where organizations from three sectors (public, non-profit and corporate) stand out, as well as their representative structures at different geographical levels, which are referred to in the following paragraphs. Information to support the options, identity and content of the "IN_Visibility" Intervention.

4.1 Supranational level

In this context, it is necessary to mention the ONU, which in 2015 presented the 2030 Agenda, composed of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations Development Group (2014). The 2030 Agenda is an agenda that addresses various dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) with the aim of promoting peace, justice and effective institutions. The SDGs are based on the progress and lessons learned from the 8 MDGs (Millennium Development Goals, established for the previous cycle from 2000 to 2015), and are the result of the joint work of governments and the result of the joint work of governments and citizens around the world. The 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals establish a common vision for humanity, a contract between world leaders and the people, and a list of commitments to be fulfilled on behalf of the people and the planet, specifically: SDG nº1 - Eradicate Poverty; and SDG nº10 - Reduce Inequalities and SDG nº11. "Make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" specifically with target 1 "By 2030, ensure access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all people and improve slums".

Also at the supranational level, reference should be made to the contributions of the EU, which in

2007, through Regulation nº168/2007 of the Council of the European Union, created the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) as a body dedicated to safeguarding the principles of liberty, respect for human rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms, which results in greater awareness of the Member States on the issue of PWH.

Equally important are also Principle 19 of the Social Pillar (Housing and assistance for homeless people) and also the European Parliament's Resolution of 24 November 2020 on addressing homelessness rates in the EU and the European Parliament's Resolution of 21 January 2021 on access to decent and affordable housing for all.

Also at the supranational level, it is worth mentioning the European Federation of National Organizations working with homelessness, an organization that brings together non-profit organizations involved in or contributing to the fight against homelessness in Europe, being the only major network that focuses exclusively on homeless people at the European level. This organization held a Seminar in Rome in 2003, at which the most diverse national policies carried out by each Member State were presented and from which a manual of good practices in the field of assistance to the homeless was produced, with the aim of ensuring that the National Action Plans include this issue in their social inclusion strategies. It should be noted that the European Federation of National Organizations working with homelessness (2007) developed a European typology for housing-related PWH (designated by ETHOS), in which the population is classified into four broad groups that fall into situations of homelessness, lack of housing, precarious housing and inadequate housing.

In this European context, reference should also be made to *Housing Rights Watch*, which is also a network formed by interdisciplinary groups of associations, lawyers and academics from different countries who are committed to promoting the right to housing for all.

The European Federation of National Organisations Working with Homelessness and Housing Rights Watch presented the Declaration of Human Rights of the PWH at the Cities Forum, which took place in 2017, in the city of Rotterdam.

This was followed by the birth of a European Platform on Combating Homelessness in 2021, which represents the possibility of dialogue and joint work in the fight against homelessness, fostering a better exchange of knowledge and practices among EU member states, including local authorities (municipalities and service providers).

4.2. National

Portugal includes in its Constitution of the Republic the constitutional and legal precepts relating to fundamental rights that must be interpreted and integrated in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 16, n. 2, of 2005). It is under this perspective and, taking into account beforehand that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights attests that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", that the Portuguese State is implicitly obliged to promote the conditions considered necessary for the dignity, freedom and access to rights of all its citizens, without exception, extracting from the spirit and letter of these two important documents, the idea of human dignity, which is fundamental when addressing the subject of the PWH.

In line with supranational guidelines, Portugal began to systematically develop a survey, in an integrated manner throughout the country, of the characterization of homelessness, culminating in the development and approval of the first ENIPSSH, which dates back to 2009 and operated until 2015. Two years later, it would be the second strategy, which will run until 2023, after approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers Resolution of the Council of Ministers (CRM), n. 107/2017, of July 25.

This strategy was modified by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 2/2020 of January 21, 2020, with the objective of ensuring the rapid implementation of ENIPSSH to respond to the needs of the PWH. This implied the creation of the position of the Executive Manager of ENIPSSH (2017-2023), who ensures the respective management, coordinating the Strategy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Group and the Executive Nucleus of said body, and also ensuring the articulation between other bodies and structures of the Strategy.

The implementation and diffusion throughout all the national territory of this legal title is carried out through the use of biannual Action Plans, and has mobilized a progressive number of public agencies, private entities, as well as grassroots civil society organizations (and their respective

representative structures). In this context, it is worth mentioning the Planning and Intervention Centres for People without Home⁴ and the designation of local interlocutors, who contribute to the implementation of an action model aimed at identifying appropriate solutions to the situations diagnosed and guaranteeing the implementation of prevention strategies.

4.3 Regional and sub-regional

We will highlight here two structures whose areas of intervention cover the Alentejo region: the Regional Social Security Centres and the Alentejo Supramunicipal Platforms.

The Regional Social Security Centres (and their respective Local Services) are decentralized services of the Social Security Institute, I.P. (ISS, I.P.) responsible for each of the 18 sub-regional divisions designated by districts that integrate a variable number of municipalities, for the execution of the necessary measures for the development and management of benefits, contributions and social action.

As of 2019, emergency care for PWH is provided at any Regional Social Security Centre, regardless of the place of registration or the existence of a family file, a service that includes the processing of requests for support in the context of social accompaniment.

There are four Supramunicipal Platforms of Alentejo⁵ and they correspond to structures whose territorial scope covers the municipalities that are part of the respective NUT III and whose objective is to guarantee supramunicipal articulation and planning (which cover the responses to the PWH). Its main objectives are: i) to combat poverty and social exclusion; ii) to promote integrated social development through the implementation of integrated and systematic planning (enhancing synergies, capacities and resources); iii) to contribute to the achievement, monitoring and evaluation of the objectives of the National Plans that contribute to Inclusion; iv) ensure, at the level of planning instruments, the integration of gender equality objectives; v) ensure greater effectiveness and better coverage and organization of all responses and equipment at the level of the municipalities that make up the Platform's territory; and vi) create regular channels of communication and information between the various partners and the population.

It should be noted as a partial conclusion that this point made clear which are the supra-national, national and regional (and sub-regional) entities involved in the problem of the PWH and what guidelines have been issued on the subject, in order to understand the normative context that marks the emergence of the "IN_Visibility", article that is complemented in the following section with a framework that allows the understanding of the phenomenon in its theoretical-conceptual aspect.

It does not address reports of collaboration between Universities and Civil Society organizations in the work to respond to the problems of PWH, since no publications focusing on this topic were identified during the research, which justifies the mention of the experience that took place in Évora as described in point 6.

5. Homelessness in a changing context: the perspective of the sociology of the action

In order to provide a better understanding of the operation of "IN-Visibility" and the contribution of the University of Évora team, this section presents a characterization of the current context in which the initiative is being developed, together with the theoretical support that sustains it.

5.1. Changing context as reinforcement of complex social problems

The era in which we find ourselves has been objectified by several authors who highlight different relevant features. This is the case of Beck (1986, 2010) who proposes the conceptualization of risk society, Baumann (2001) who proposes the term liquid modernity, and Crutzen (2002) who suggests

⁴ In portuguese: NPISA – Núcleos de Planeamento e Intervenção para os Sem-Abrigo.

⁵ The Supramunicipal Platforms of Alentejo are: The Supramunicipal Platform of Central Alentejo, The Supramunicipal Platform of Coastal Alentejo, The Supramunicipal Platform of High Alentejo and The Supramunicipal Platform of Low Alentejo.

the designation of Anthropocene.

The inability of social institutions to control the risks that society faces today is associated with the fragility of the links between people and between people and institutions and the human influence on the planet.

It is in this context of constant change, and with the aim of explaining the transformations we are undergoing, that different denominations emerge, among which the VUCA world and the BANI world stand out.

These transitory perceptions were systematized in the post-Cold War period by U.S. militants through the VUCA concept to explain the emerging dynamics of the new international order and the resulting social transformations. The main attributes of this scenario focus on rapid (and sometimes abrupt) transformations, developing technological contexts and global instability, which gave rise to the acronym VUCA -Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous- to characterize the world, and has since been widely used to describe the technological and cultural changes at the turn of the 21st century.

For Cascio (2020)⁶ there are situations that are not simply ambiguous, but incomprehensible and whose outcomes are unpredictable, so that volatility or complexity may be insufficient conditions to understand today's world. Which led him to create a new definition, BANI -Fragile, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible, i.e., it considers the world Fragile, Anxious, Nonlinear and Incomprehensible. A concept that was reinforced with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, giving rise to the consideration that chaotic situations can occur, leading to another designation of a chaordic world: between Chaos and Order.

Hock, at the beginning of the 21st century, wrote the book "The Birth of the Chaordic Age", where he argues that one of the basic organizing principles of human nature and evolution is the existence of a behaviour that combines characteristics of order and chaos. It is a proactive space, which, not knowing what is going to happen, is receptive to the capacity for self-organization, diversity, creativity and innovation. It is a learning space based on networking, collaborative economy and participative leadership, where the idea of dynamism emerges against apathy and discouragement, as the only path to sustainability in a world that tends to evolve towards ever greater complexity.

These frameworks emerge in contexts of change, from the Cold War to the COVID-19 pandemic (and since February 24, 2022, the War in Europe). These are changing scenarios with no fixed rules where the unpredictability of the future leads to the loss of meaning of long-term strategies, and which require the ability to deal adequately with emerging and complex situations. Welfare and social cohesion are subject to enormous political and financial pressure, and institutions tend to function in a disjointed manner.

It is in this context that the so-called wicked social problems gain relevance and magnitude. Wicked problem (complex problem) was the term proposed, in 1973, by Rittel and Webber, when they realized that the use of continuous approaches may result in failure when problems are characterized by their "intractability" and ubiquity, however, the recognition of such features could lead to changes in the approaches to understand and solve such problems. The use of the concept was generalized, as advocated by Xiang (2013), in diverse fields and by several authors (Levin et al, 2012; Lazarus, 2009). And according to Marques (2014), these problems present the following specificities:

- Difficult to define;
- Interdependencies and multicausalities;
- It involves behavioral changes;
- Solutions may generate new problems;
- Socially complex;
- There are no clear solutions;
- It crosses organizational boundaries and accountability;
- Difficult to solve and with chronic failures in the solutions presented.

In other words, a wicked problem is one that is difficult or impossible to solve because of the incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements that characterize it, and which are often difficult

⁶ For more information access: <https://ageofbani.com/>

to recognize. The use of the term "wicked" ("complex") is used to indicate resistance to resolution, and not necessarily illegitimate or illegal situations. Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to resolve one aspect of a complex problem may reveal or create other problems, as is the case with PWH as a vulnerable group. It should be added that it is generally a problem whose solution requires a large number of people to change their mentality and behaviour, issues that pose significant methodological challenges (Santos, 2016).

5.2 Sociology of action (action-research) as a response to homelessness.

The challenges mentioned in the previous point are reinforced in the perspective of the sociology of action, which in the 1970s was oriented towards a "more critical sociology, which focuses on a rational approach of the actors to define strategies appropriate to the goals to be achieved, taking into account the objectives set, minimizing/annulling the weaknesses and enhancing the strengths, in a direct relationship between the sociologist and the study population" (Santos and Baltazar, 2017: 17). The interest in a "theory of action", in the search for social change, stems from a relationship between intervention and knowledge (Guerra, 2003) and results from the fact that it combines production and immediate use, without being a "pure" research methodology, or even rules of mediated action, in a permanent search for balance and without hegemonic temptations of either of the two aspects (Santos and Baltazar, 2017). The knowledge obtained is applied in the resolution of practical or social problems, especially when presented as complex social problems, being a research methodology that presupposes the improvement of practice.

To deal with this type of issues, decision-makers can resort to three strategies which, according to Roberts (2000), are the following: i) Authoritarian (through which an attempt is made to dominate a complex problem by driving the process by a small number of people; ii) Competitive (through which attempts are made to solve complex problems by confronting opposing points of view, which requires the parties involved to express their preferred solutions), and iii) Collaborative (acted with the objective of involving all interested parties and thus finding the best possible solution for all involved).

The methodological approaches applied for this purpose are diverse, whether of a fundamental nature or procedural methodologies, as will be developed in point 6. It is worth noting as a partial conclusion that the distinctive features of contemporaneity refer to a world in constant change, where technology stands out, and where different conceptualizations emerge to understand the emerging dynamics of the new international order and how it impacts on other levels of specialization, in its multiple dimensions of life in society. The complexity of the social problems that arise and in the context of the sociology of action approach, there is a reference to the definition of intervention strategies whose rationality of the actors presupposes the adequate definition of goals and consequent follow-up. And this is the approach underlying the "IN_Visibility" intervention that will be presented below.

6. The "IN_Visibility" intervention: a response in Portugal to PWH

Having presented the supranational, national, regional and subregional contexts and theoretical and conceptual contributions, we now include the point that aims to briefly introduce the identity of the project called "IN_Visibility" Intervention aimed at people at risk of social exclusion, meaning, people at risk due to their homeless status, the respective backgrounds and a portrait of the intervention area in question. Given that the Intervention derives from the provisions of point 4 of the Re-solution of the Council of Ministers N°107/2017 approving the ENIPSSH (2017-2023), whose fourth point establishes the Intervention Model, providing that "When the dimension of the phenomenon justifies it, a Homelessness Planification and Intervention Centre should be implemented within the scope of the Social Network". Under this legal title, 25 Centres for Planning and Intervention for the Homeless have already been created in Portugal, including the Évora Centre. Corresponding to these structures, according to point 6.4. of the aforementioned Resolution of the Council of Ministers, functions of planification and intervention in the respective territory, for which reason the Portuguese government created lines of financing for the presentation of candidatures leading to the creation of conditions conducive to the creation of Biennial Action Plans at the local level.

6.1. Background and presentation of NPISA Évora

The work with the PWH in the municipality of Évora dates back to 2016, when it was launched by

the Local Insertion Centre⁷, constituted by the District Centre of the Social Security Institute IP (ISS.IP); Integrated Response Centre; Évora City Hall; Évora Humanitarian Centre - Portuguese Red Cross; and Social and Parish Centre of S. Brás - Temporary Housing Centre. The Local Insertion Centre, along the lines stipulated in the ENIPSSH 2009-2015, identified 16 situations of PWH through the application of a questionnaire. In December 2016, it was reinforced with the integration of other entities, with the objective of deepening the diagnosis of the situation of the PWH in Évora according to the ENIPSSH in force and, aligning this work with the Local Council of Social Action of Évora. This Council is a municipal structure made up of representatives of public agencies and non-profit organizations, whose functions are to carry out the so-called Social Diagnosis of the municipality and prepare a multi-year Social Development Plan.

After the aforementioned first intervention, completed in 2017, the so-called Homeless Network Unit was set up within the scope of the Local Social Action Council of Évora, resulting from the characterization of SII (Social Insertion Income) beneficiaries, who found themselves homeless in 2016 and who were monitored by the Local Insertion Centre (operational structure of the RSI).

Subsequently, in July 2020, the collaboration protocol was signed, establishing the Évora Centre for Planning and Intervention for the Homeless, which applies a systemic approach in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and assumes as its objective the intervention focused on the PWH, so that no one has to stay on the street for lack of alternatives, being an initiative guided by the following four structural guidelines:

- MISSION - to contribute to the promotion of human dignity;
- VISION - to consolidate a strategic and holistic approach to prevention and intervention, focusing on people at risk and/or homeless;
- STRATEGY - promote conditions of autonomy and full exercise of citizenship of PWH;
- VALUES - respect for human rights, social justice, equal opportunities, equity, responsibility and collaboration.

The coordination of the Planning and Intervention Centre for Homeless People of Évora is in charge of the Évora Humanitarian Centre of the Portuguese Red Cross and develops a network work that includes several partner entities/organizations such as: the Évora District Centre of the Social Security Institute, IP ; the Évora City Hall; the Central Alentejo Integrated Response Centre of the Alentejo Regional Health Administration; the Community Care Unit of the Central Alentejo Group of Health Centres; the Institute of Employment and Professional Training - Employment Service of Évora; Habévora (Municipal housing Company); Santa Casa de la Misericórdia of Évora; Caritas Arquidiocesana of Évora; Association Pan and Paz; Centro Social y Parroquial de S. Brás - Centre of Temporary Housing; and the Vidas Ativas 4G Project (run by the Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of Mentally Handicapped Citizens - Évora).

It should also be noted that the Centre for Planning and Intervention for Homeless People has been developing its intervention based on three dimensions, aligned with the ENIPSSH (2017-2023), Resolution of the Council of Ministers N°107/2017 of July 25, namely:

- Dimension I: Promotion of knowledge about the PWH phenomenon, information, awareness raising and education; Who coordinates? What have you already done?
- Dimension II: Reinforcement of an intervention that favours the integration of PWH;
- Dimension III: Coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

These are the circumstances underlying the appearance of the "IN_Visibility" intervention, briefly presented below.

As stated in the Descriptive Report submitted by the developer, the main objectives of the IN_Visibility intervention are sevenfold:

1. Contribute to the progressive biopsychosocial (re)structuring of PWH, encouraging the promotion of citizenship;
2. Facilitate access to basic living conditions through the mobilization of social and health resources;
3. Promote health care;
4. Promote risk reduction and harm minimization associated with the consumption of

⁷ In Portuguese: NLI – Núcleo Local de Inserção.

psychoactive substances, among others.

5. To train PWH for social and labor insertion;
6. Combating stigma and prejudice against homelessness in the municipality of Évora;
7. Ensure the conditions for the autonomy of the PWH benefiting from the intervention.

To achieve these objectives, the intervention includes three types of actions (adapted to the call for these initiatives):

- a) the creation of teams to ensure psychosocial follow-up and access to existing resources in the community, as well as integrated responses aimed at people at risk of social exclusion, particularly the homeless;
- b) the development of responses that implement occupational actions appropriate to the characteristics and vulnerabilities of homeless people, favoring employability and professional insertion;
- c) actions that favour the fight against the stigma affecting the condition of homelessness: initiatives to inform and sensitize local communities about the phenomenon of homelessness, such as the purpose of preventing and combating discrimination and training and actions of professional training to measure the cognitive, psychological and emotional skills and the state of physical and mental health of homeless people.

6.2 Zone of implementation of the "IN_Visibility" intervention.

The intervention takes place in the municipality of Évora (the fifth largest municipality in Portugal), located in NUTS III Alentejo Central, one of the four sub-regions that make up NUTS II Alentejo. The municipality is dominated by activities related to the tertiary sector (commercial and non-commercial), which occupies about 2/3 of the active population (public services, small commerce, handicrafts and tourism), followed by the secondary sector, which includes food and extractive industries (wood, cork and marble) and finally the primary sector.

In terms of population, in 2021 the municipality had 53,591 inhabitants spread over 12 parishes (the smallest administrative division in Portugal), one of which is located in the historic centre (intramural city, where 4,315 inhabitants reside), two in the outskirts (where 49,329 inhabitants reside), one in the transition zone (where 3,314 inhabitants reside) and eight in the rural zone (where 5,697 inhabitants reside) (INE, 2022)⁸.

The main social problems of this region are, specifically, the following eight:

- Unemployment/Employment
 - Homeless people (PWH)
 - Aging
 - People with disabilities
 - Domestic violence
 - Social support
 - Children and youth at risk
 - Ethnic minorities (especially for the gypsy community)
- (Source: Núcleo Executivo, 2019)

In this territory, within the universe of the PWH, 26 receive accompaniment from the team of the Planning and Intervention Centre for the Homeless, mostly men (81% approximately), and whose ages range between 45 and 64 years (17 people), identifying only two people over 64 years old, and six people between 31 and 44 years old, almost all of Portuguese nationality, with only a residual number of two foreigners. The educational levels of this population are very low, with five people without any completed level of education, 10 people with the 1st cycle of basic education, eight with the 2nd cycle or 3rd cycle completed and only two with complete secondary education (Cruz Vermelha Portuguesa - Centro Humanitário de Évora, 2021)⁹. It is worth mentioning as a partial conclusion that the territory where the IN_Visibility Intervention is being developed (municipality of Évora) houses the city of the same name, which is a regional axis composed of a historic centre (intramural area), the surrounding belt, a transition zone and a large rural area with a predominantly

⁸ According to data from the Census 2021 – XVI General Population Census. VI General Housing Census: https://censos.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpgid=censos21_produtos&xpid=CENSOS21&xlang=ptm

⁹ Information provided by the NPISA (Évora), as indicated in the Project's Description | IN_Visibility Intervention

tertiary sector.

The problems affecting the population of the municipality are, among others, the People in Homelessness Situation, whose number, according to the applicable legislation, justifies the joint effort of public entities and non-profit organizations, to respond to the immediate needs and implement measures that contribute to minimize the difficult situation of this public, through the implementation of the above-mentioned intervention, which, we recall, counts with the participation of a team from the University of Évora, whose contribution is clarified in the following point.

7. Experience of collaboration between the University of Évora and the Civil Society: a methodological platform for the action-research aimed at the PWH

Having challenged academia to participate in Activity 4 (Study on the identification of risk and vulnerability factors) of the IN-Visibility Intervention, for the contribution it can provide in technical and scientific support, the purpose of this section is to present this contribution, which consisted of complying with that which was established in the Descriptive Report issued by the entity responsible for the intervention, namely, carrying out the six topics that constitute the aforementioned study, through the methodology proposed in that document.

7.1 Work to be carried out by the University of Évora team

According to the descriptive report (previous information issued by the project promoter), the University team would be responsible for fulfilling the following tasks:

1. Identification and contextualization of the PWH concept and phenomenon;
2. Generic framework of ENIPSSH and the planification and intervention Centre for homeless people in Évora -alignment of the study with the National and Local Strategy;
3. Contextualization of the problem in the municipality;
4. Characterization of the problem in the municipality - using indicators already used in the ENIPSSH, and/or others to be included;
5. Identification of Risk Factors already used in ENIPSSH, and/or others to be included.

The realization of this work requires from the University team a previous preparation, and all its own and collaborative work throughout the three moments, supported by a resource that will be presented in the following point.

7.2. Methodology adopted (in the collaborative experience)

The University of Évora team has a Framework, a set of techniques, tools or generic concepts that can be adapted to different contexts, called "Guiding Model of Thinking, Knowledge and Intervention" (table 2), which includes the following topics:

- Context
- Research paradigms
- Specific metatheories and theories
- Primary structured approaches
- Complementary structured approaches
- Mobile operating tools
- Methodological script

Although the implementation of the "IN_Visibility" intervention is still in the initial take-off phase, it can be seen that the use of participatory methodologies adopted by the University of Évora team has proven to be of evident usefulness as it provided a desirable empathy and the indispensable alignment between both teams involved, in terms of the content of the statements on the identity of the initiative, details on methodological options and practical issues.

Likewise, and taking into account previous experiences, the principles and tools included in the *Framework* will be considered in the next phases, which, in the case of the project in question, includes the particularity of the application of non-technical and technical skills, and the expectation

that the joint work will provide for the integrated production of knowledge, that is, through the publication of joint articles. It is also considered that this methodological approach allows the formation of technical teams in the different entities that integrate this project, enhancing learning for its application in future interventions, particularly those aimed at vulnerable audiences.

A contribution that can also be extended to the academic training contexts of the students who attend the master's course in Sociology at the University of Évora, and who, during the classes of Planning and Evaluation of Programs and Projects, become aware of and try out this collection of methodologies of collaborative actions based on concrete cases of projects in which the teaching team participates.

Table 2. Contribution of University of Évora to the Guiding Model of Thought, Knowledge and Intervention

Phases of the work developed by the University of Évora	Collaborative practices Collaborative tools		Skills to be mobilized and enhanced to improve collaborative practices	
	Transversal	Punctual Occasional	Non-technical	Techniques
Phase 1. Initial stage. Work packages. 1.1. Adjustment on: i) the general issues and the object of the work to be done, ii) the constitution of the basic team; Stabilization of the basic bureaucratic-administrative/procedural conditions (Specifications and Budget); 1.3. Knowledge of the composition of the teams on both sides (who is who) and ways of working together.	<i>Design thinking</i> (define/clarify): empathy mapping Agile methodologies	Chronological reference; <i>Check list</i> ; 5W2H; MEL (Matrix of Logical Framework);	Critical reasoning; proactivity; communication; positive attitude; flexibility and resilience; teamwork; creativity; moral principle; critical thinking.	Project development: <i>PMBok (Project Management Body of Knowledge)</i> Budget preparation
Phase 2. Intermediate stage Work packages 2.1 Thematic exploratory audit: what do you know? what do you need to know? how to do it? 2.2 Collection, processing and analysis of the additional information available 2.3. Collection, processing and analysis of the information generated	<i>Design thinking</i> (discover): mind map	Force field analysis; Gap analysis; SWOT analysis; and/or variants, viz: DEOP; 5 why.	Complex problems; proactivity; communication; positive attitude; flexibility and resilience; creativity; moral principle; critical thinking.	Systematic Literature Review; Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis and Processing Software; Reference Management Software.
Phase 3. Final moment. Work packages 3.1. Drafting by the CICS.NOVA. UEvora team of the initial versions of the work topics. 3.2Appreciation and feedback by representatives of the contracting institution of the initial versions of the work topics 3.3.Elaboration and approval of the plan for presentation and dissemination of the documents produced. 3.4. Consideration and approval of the final versions (including evaluation of the final document)	<i>Design thinking</i> (develop-deliver): co-creation.	Collaborative writing work.	Proactivity; Communication; Positive attitude; creativity; flexibility and resilience; moral principle; critical thinking	Scientific writing; computer skills from the user's point of view; prototyping; science outreach.

(Source: own elaboration).

8. Conclusions

The phenomenon of PWH, due to the dimensions it has reached, is of concern to supranational, national, regional and subregional organizations, which, within the scope of their attributions, and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, have been contributing to the issuance and implementation of prescriptive and corrective responses, either by means of:

- multilateral organizations (such as the ONU),
- intergovernmental organizations (in the case of the European Union),

- international networks of Non-Profit Institutions (in the case of the European Federation of National Organizations dealing with Homelessness),
- national networks (National Network of Planning and Intervention Centres for the Homeless),
- inter-institutional networks, whether international (in the case of *Housing Rights Watch*), national (such as the National Confederation of Solidarity Institutions), regional or subregional (supra-municipal platforms), or even local (municipal Social Networks and Planning and Intervention Centers for the Homeless, councils).

This phenomenon has also been the subject of considerable academic research, and from a theoretical-conceptual point of view it is considered a complex phenomenon.

In Évora (municipality of Alentejo) this phenomenon has been considered as a monitoring and intervention problem since 2015, within the scope of a broad local partnership called Municipal Social Network (which includes municipalities, public bodies, Social Economy organizations, the University of Évora and still two companies).

In 2022 in this municipality, within the framework of current legislation, and led by local organizations, a project was launched to respond to the problem called "IN_Visibility" Intervention, this short-term intervention includes five activities, one of which, Activity 4, called "Study (Identification of risk factors and vulnerability)" has the technical-scientific contribution of a team from the University of Évora.

In view of the Description, Objectives, Audience, Target, Objective and Expected Results, formulated by the Project Coordinating Committee, and taking into account the complexity of the social problem, the University team faced the challenge of finding resources that would allow consistent responses to the identified and unforeseen challenges inherent to the different phases of the work to be carried out.

The team used a Framework (a system of rules, ideas or beliefs used to plan or decide something) that has been refined through collaboration in several intervention projects on social problems. Although in the case of the "IN_Visibility" Intervention project, we are in the initial phase, it can be stated that the use of models such as Design Thinking and agile methodologies has created a collaborative environment that enhances the use and results of the application of structured approaches (that is, the Chronological Reference, the 5W2H checklist and the Logical Framework Matrix), and encourages the application of other structured approaches and operational tools, thus contributing to the participation of academia for sustainability and innovation in active social protection policies with vulnerable groups, in this case the PWH of the municipality of Évora.

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Maria da Saudade Baltazar has a PhD in Sociology. She is currently Associate Professor at the University of Évora (Portugal) in the Department of Sociology and integrated researcher at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Sciences. Recent publications address public policies for ex-combatants; participatory methodologies for territorial development; territorial, social and gender inequalities; higher education, human rights and security.

Marcos Olímpio Dos Santos has a degree and a PhD in Sociology. Former university professor (University of Évora and Instituto Superior de Serviço Social - Portugal). Integrated researcher of the Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences. Trainer in topics related to development and social inclusion. He has acted as consultant, evaluator or team member of several national and international projects. He is also author or co-author of several publications on local development and social intervention.