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NGO–Public Administration Relationships in Tackling the Homelessness Problem in the Czech Republic and Poland

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Abstract: Recently, the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Poland and the Czech Republic has increased, which has translated into a growing tendency to change the procedures for social assistance provision. However, the relationships between public administration and non-governmental organisations differ in both countries. The Najam Four-C's Model is used in this paper to describe how NGOs and public administration approach the problem of homelessness in the Czech Republic and Poland. To explore this issue, the authors conducted interviews with public servants and NGOs' managers in both countries. The findings show that, as far as homelessness is concerned, NGOs and state authorities function on the basis of complementarity in Poland as well as in the Czech Republic.

Keywords: homelessness; NGOs; public administration



Citation: Sidor, Monika, and Dina Abdelhafez. 2021. NGO–Public Administration Relationships in Tackling the Homelessness Problem in the Czech Republic and Poland. *Administrative Sciences* 11: 24. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11010024>

Received: 29 December 2020

Accepted: 19 February 2021

Published: 1 March 2021

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1. Introduction

The problem of homelessness is one of the critical issues related to social assistance both in Poland and the Czech Republic. Welfare work is not carried out by public administration entities alone. Due to the development and strengthening of the tertiary sector in Poland and the Czech Republic, there is now a growing tendency to increase its role in rendering social assistance. In both countries, cooperation of public administration with non-governmental organisations has recently been fostered in this field; however, this cooperation assumes different forms. The aim of the present paper is to describe the relationships between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and public administration as regards the implementation of the public task of fighting homelessness in Poland and the Czech Republic. Therefore, the main research objective is to explore how local governments cooperate with NGOs in providing social assistance to the homeless and make a comparison between both countries. A framework based on the Najam Four-C's Model is used to describe these relationships.

To collect data for this article, the authors used qualitative research methods. The main actors in dealing with the problem of homelessness are the public sector and NGOs; therefore, the authors used secondary data from official documents drawn up by ministries. The research is supplemented by in-depth interviews.

The paper is divided into eight sections. Firstly, the authors introduce the Najam Four-C's Model. Secondly, the use of the qualitative method to collect secondary data is explained. Then, the authors describe the background and the definitions of homelessness in Poland and the Czech Republic. After this, the article concentrates on the legislative context of homelessness in both countries. The authors discuss the general policy procedures implemented in both countries to address the problem. Then, a closer look is taken at the stakeholders in the homelessness issues in the countries under examination. Finally, the

authors conclude with a summary of how the relationships between local governments differ in both countries, depending on their internal policies.

It is worth noting that the problem of homelessness has been raised by many researchers. One of the most comprehensive studies on homelessness in the European Union is the report “Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States”. It analyses the problem of homelessness in 15 countries, including Poland and the Czech Republic, defining a homeless person as “an individual who, regardless of nationality, age, sex, socio-economic status and mental and physical health, is roofless and living in a public space or insecure form of shelter or accommodated in an emergency shelter, or is houseless and living in temporary accommodation for the homeless” (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2014). This official Portuguese definition is consistent with a similar approach adopted in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2014).

Another extensive report from the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) research on homelessness in 35 European countries emphasises that “because the wider the definition of homelessness, the wider the range of services and supports that tend to be provided. If homelessness is just defined as people living rough, only a relatively small range of services focused on a comparatively small population is required. If the problem is seen as encompassing hidden homelessness, there are more women, more families, and a much wider range of homeless people more generally, as well as bigger numbers of people involved” (Baptista and Marlier 2019). Therefore, given the diversity of definitions, individual countries have different approaches to the classification of the homeless, and thus show different statistics on the scale of this phenomenon and create public policy differently, also in the financial field.

By contrast, American researchers indicate that many studies on homelessness are based on Rossi, who perceives a homeless person as “not having customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling” (Lee et al. 2010). Lee et al. (2010) also conducted studies on homelessness in the United States, concentrating on its demographic aspect. Some particular facets of the problem have been thoroughly investigated, e.g., Dozier describes the formation of grassroots organisations and groups of residents responding to police actions against the homeless in one of Los Angeles districts (Dozier 2019). A different attitude towards the homeless is described by the researchers Clarke and Parsell, who point out that local business, various services and institutions work together to hide the homeless from view in the tourist areas of the Australian city of Cairns (Clarke and Parsell 2018). On the other hand, a broader analysis of the spatial perspective of research on homelessness is carried out by DeVerteuil, May and Von Mahs (DeVerteuil et al. 2009), while Dobson (2020) presents how practitioners work with the homeless in northern England in the conditions of neoliberal state policy and necessity to cut down on expenses. Koprowska, Kronenberg, Kuźma and Łaszkiwicz (Koprowska et al. 2020) are the authors of an empirical study which includes interviews not only with practitioners (streetworkers) helping the homeless, but also homeless people themselves (the selection criterion was the use of urban green spaces by them). Finally, interesting research on homelessness through participant observation was conducted by the Italian researcher Lancione (2014).

2. Theoretical Framework—Najam Four-C’s Model

Najem (2000) introduced his theory as a conceptual framework for understanding interactions between non-governmental and governmental entities. However, the framework was developed in isolation from some factors related to the nature of government, which is either democratic or authoritarian, the state of development which is either advanced industrialised or agrarian, and economic ideology, which is either a liberal market economy or a controlled economy. For this reason, the present paper draws on this theory to make a comparison between the Czech Republic and Poland. The model’s objective is to answer the question of pursuing certain ends (goals) using specific means (strategies). The framework introduces different combinations to explain the relationships between NGOs

and public administration. Najem (2000) distinguishes four possible relations depending on the objectives as well as on the strategies (or means) chosen. These are: (1) cooperation—occurring when both the state and NGOs pursue similar objectives and select similar means, (2) complementarity—taking place when the state and NGOs have similar objectives but prefer to choose different means for their achievement, (3) co-optation—when both sides have similar strategies, but different objectives, and (4) confrontation—occurring when both the objectives and the strategies (means) differ between the state and NGOs (Najem 2000). This model is used in the present study to compare the NGO–government relationships in the Czech Republic and Poland as regards the way of dealing with the problem of homeless people and providing them with social assistance.

Cooperation between non-governmental organisations and public administration takes place through common goals in open communication and a certain coordination of tasks (Sanyal 1994; Waddell 1998). This relationship requires appropriate access to free information by NGOs and neutral rules and policies of the government concerning NGOs (Coston 1998). In his definition of the complementary relationship, Young (2000) explains that it is a partnership in which governmental agencies provide funding for public services, and NGOs are responsible for delivering them. The model defines confrontation as a situation in which the government pursues coercive control, which is opposed by NGOs. Thus, the confrontation relationship encompasses opposition from NGOs and coercion by the state apparatus. This relationship may include dissimilarity of the ends and means of both the government and NGOs. Najem (2000) claims that sometimes there is a conflict between the state and NGOs in the co-optation relationship. It occurs when one actor tries to change the objectives of the other actor, thus leading to confrontation. The confrontation results from one actor's trying to convince the other one that its goals are a subset of the other subject's goals.

3. Research Methods

In this paper, the authors used the institutional and legal method, which served to establish the legal basis for the relationships between NGOs and public administration; besides, a content analysis was made on documents drawn up by the ministries. Based on the content analysis method, the authors examined official documents to collect data related to the definition of homelessness, a legislative context, policy procedures, and stakeholders in each country. This method helped to explore the relationships between the state and NGOs in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The research was complemented by conducting structured, in-depth interviews to obtain data which allowed the relationships in each country to be categorised according to the Najem Four-C model. The interviews lasted from about 40 min up to an hour and consisted of 12 questions. They were taped and then transcribed. The main thematic scope included: (1) statistics on homelessness and problems of their collection, (2) strategic documents and joint creation of homelessness prevention policy, (3) legal regulations and their practical application and (4) differences in approaching homelessness by public administration and non-governmental organisations. The interviews were analysed in this regard.

In Poland, the authors conducted five interviews, two of which were done with representatives of non-governmental organisations, two others with representatives of the city hall and one with an employee of the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy (MRPiPS). One non-governmental organisation—nationwide—mainly deals with serving meals and running facilities for the homeless. The second non-governmental organisation, local and operating only in Warsaw, is directly involved in work on the street with the homeless (street working). By contrast, three interviews were held with representatives of public administration. The first of these interviews took place at the Warsaw City Hall with two high-ranking officials dealing directly with homelessness issues. The second interview was given by a representative of the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy.

Moreover, the authors conducted two interviews in the Czech Republic: one of them was with an official of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the other one with a spokesperson for one of the most prominent NGOs that helps the homeless.

It should be added that all interviews were formally recorded. Besides, one of the authors observed the work of volunteers with NGOs helping homeless people and organising well-known events (the Christmas Eve dinner for the homeless, a voluntary action of providing the homeless with hot meals and blankets in the winter—the so-called “hot patrol”, and a famous soup kitchen in the very centre of the city). She was also a volunteer in Emmaus, an organisation helping the socially excluded in France (Niort—Prahecq). This allowed her to deeper understand the problem of homelessness.

4. Background and Definitions of Homelessness in Poland and the Czech Republic

4.1. Poland

The formal definition of a homeless person in Poland was adopted in the Social Welfare Act of 2004. It is a person who does not live in an apartment in the meaning of the provisions on the protection of tenants’ rights and is not registered for permanent residence in the understanding of the provisions on the population register; it is also a person who, despite being registered, cannot live in an apartment ([Act 3 2004](#)). This definition is not as broad as recommended in the ESPN report and does not include, among others, people temporarily living with their family or friends due to lack of accommodation ([Baptista and Marlier 2019](#)).

During the night from 13 to 14 February 2019, the fifth national study on homelessness was conducted by the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy (MRPiPS). This study shows that there are 30,330 homeless people; among them, 83.6% are men, and 16.4% are women. This gender structure is dominant in Europe. In most countries, men predominate among the homeless (they often constitute over 75% of all the counted homeless people) ([Baptista and Marlier 2019](#)). Also, in the United States, the majority of the homeless, although to a lesser extent, are men (61%) ([U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2020](#)).

In Poland, the most significant numbers of the homeless are in the Mazovia Province—4278 people, the Silesia Province—4255, and the Pomerania Province—3014 ([Wyniki Ogólnopolskiego badania 2019](#)). Taking into account the urbanisation rate in Poland as well as a number of inhabitants living in a given province, these results confirm the thesis that there is a relationship between the variables mentioned above and the level of homelessness. The Silesia Province has the highest level of urbanisation in Poland (77%), and the Mazovia Province with Warsaw takes the first place in terms of number of inhabitants (5.4 million inhabitants) ([Informacja o sytuacji 2016](#)). Therefore, one can hypothesise that the higher the level of urbanisation, the greater the phenomenon of homelessness.

Homelessness has different causes and there is no dominant reason for it in Poland. Family conflicts are the most common cause (32.2%), closely followed by addictions (28%). In the latter group, 7919 people are categorised as addicted to alcohol, 361 as addicted to drugs and 199 as addicted to gambling. The third most common reason is eviction or departure from the place of residence (26.3%) ([Wyniki Ogólnopolskiego badania 2019](#)).

According to a practitioner who has worked with the homeless for over 20 years, it is difficult to indicate one cause of homelessness. There are many people addicted to alcohol, but when a social worker gets to know them and their situation better, it turns out that alcoholism has its roots somewhere else. About eight years ago, many people with mental illnesses, such as depression and bipolar disorders, appeared in the shelter. According to the NGO’s representative, problems of the homeless reflect the state of Polish society ([Interview NGO 1 2019](#)).

It is worth adding that the data presented in the report of the Ministry about the number of the homeless is based on the information sent by municipalities. All municipalities participated in data collection both in institutional establishments (overnight shelters, homeless hostels and heating rooms) and outside them (empty, uninhabited buildings,

arbours, stations, etc.). However, there are doubts as to whether the data provided by the Ministry fully reflect the number of homeless people. According to one NGO worker, not all homeless people could be reached in order to be included in the database. Some of the homeless appeared in a soup kitchen just to take their meal and then disappeared. According to the interviewee, this was because the homeless were not sufficiently informed about the intended survey. Also, they did not know a measurable effect of such research and its impact on their lives ([Interview NGO 2 2019](#)).

It should also be emphasised that both NGO representatives and officials did not notice a decreasing number of homeless people in Warsaw. According to an employee of the City Hall, “Due to Warsaw’s specificity and rich offer of supporting [homeless—from M. S.] people, more those in need come here” ([Interview City Hall 1 2019](#)). The number of the homeless in Warsaw is currently estimated at 2500, and in 2017, it was 2700. As one official has emphasised, this difference in the scale of Warsaw is not significant ([Interview City Hall 2 2019](#)).

4.2. Czech Republic (ČR)

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) highlighted that the phenomenon of homelessness is categorised according to various aspects, namely perception by the public, duration and cause ([Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014](#)). As far as perception by the public is concerned, the homeless can be divided into (1) the visible homeless who sleep in the street, (2) the hidden homeless who do not have their own home and live in legal or illegal accommodation and (3) the potentially homeless, who are at risk of losing their homes. In terms of duration, homelessness can be (a) short-term—up to one year, (b) medium-term—between one and five years, and (c) long-term—more than five years. Finally, homelessness, regarding its cause, encompasses four paths, namely: (a) a long path, which means that a person was born homeless or socially excluded, (b) a short path, which means that a person lost their home because of debt, unemployment, bad health condition, high cost of living and family problems, (c) an illness path, which means that someone’s loss of home resulted from his or her sickness and (d) homelessness by personal choice (*ibid*).

However, there are external factors behind homelessness which increase the burden on municipalities. For instance, the new Czech Civil Code does not address the problem of homelessness or any social housing issues, in spite of regulating property and lease. The code does not oblige the lessor, in case of terminating the tenancy contract, to shelter the lessee or provide him or her with substitute accommodation. In addition, the lessor takes potential lessees’ educational background into consideration to be sure that they will be able to pay rent. This means that municipalities have the task of providing social assistance to solve the social housing issue. Consequently, the amendment to the code was in favour of lessors, and it was the reason why many lessees lost their accommodation. As a result, the state burdens municipalities with the responsibility for providing lessees with substitute housing, so municipalities use stay-in social services to satisfy the housing needs of this group.

In the case of the Czech Republic, there are individual and structural factors behind homelessness. Individual factors include debt, unpaid rent or mortgage, family conflicts, domestic violence, release from institutional care, low social skills due to lack of socially supportive networks, mental health problems, sexual and psychological abuse in the childhood, drug and alcohol abuse and delinquent behaviour or imprisonment. In contrast, the main structural factors encompass “labour and housing market tendencies, the policy related to social benefits and social service networking, deficiencies in the educational system, the increasing poverty rate, deficiencies in creating equal opportunities, regional differences or changes in the family life” ([Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014](#)).

The statistics about the number of the homeless are mainly provided by social services and the network of experts that deal with this issue. Thus, there are no accurate empirical

data on the homeless gathered by the public authorities and policymakers. For instance, according to Trdla's article published in January (Trdla 2019), the Armáda Spásy komunitní centrum in Prague is visited by about 2500 people annually. However, there is no accurate and comprehensive information concerning homeless people or those at risk of losing their homes. The organisations give an outline of the situation by providing a number of the homeless living in asylum houses, emergency shelters and the low threshold of daily care. In particular, the MoLSA cooperates with the network of experts who carried out a survey in 2016 in order to collect aggregate data within the whole country. The survey found that the total estimated number of homeless people amounted to 68,500, and the number of people at risk of losing their homes was 120,000 (MoLSA 2016 survey). However, the recent statistics of FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) collected between 2015 and 2017 indicate that 187,500 individuals experienced exclusion from their homes (Report 2 2017).

5. Legislative Context of Homelessness in Poland and the Czech Republic

5.1. Poland

In the Polish Constitution, the principle of subsidiarity is one of the most important. This principle applies to all public bodies whose activities are aimed at strengthening the rights of citizens and their communities. Article 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland states that a citizen has the right to social security in the event of invalidity, illness, involuntary unemployment, or after reaching the retirement age. In addition, Article 75 of the Constitution stipulates that public authorities pursue policy aimed at satisfying the housing needs of citizens and preventing homelessness by supporting social housing or supporting citizens' efforts to obtain their own housing. In addition, the need to protect tenants' rights is also pointed out (Act 2 1997).

These general provisions were reflected in the Act on the Protection of Tenants' Rights, the Housing Stock of a Municipality and the Amendment to the Civil Code of 21 June 2001. The adopted solutions relate to the municipality's obligation to meet the housing needs of the municipality, by, e.g., providing low-income residents with social housing (Act 1 2001).

The primary responsibilities of the public administration regarding the social security of citizens are regulated in the Social Welfare Act of 12 of March 2004. In Poland, the principal social welfare duties are assigned to local government, mainly to the municipality. In Warsaw, local government regularly cooperates with 20 non-governmental organisations in the assistance system for the homeless (Interview City Hall 2 2019). However, some legal provisions adopted in the Social Welfare Act of 12 March 2004 are troublesome for the functioning of the social assistance system. Pursuant to Article 101 of this Act, the municipality, which is to provide benefits to a homeless person, including a place in a shelter, is the municipality where this person has his or her last place of permanent residence. Practically, "in the case of people from outside Warsaw, the social assistance centre is obliged to contact the place where this person was registered (. . .)" (Interview NGO 2 2019). Therefore, the number of necessary documents increases and the procedure for assisting a homeless person is extended.

5.2. Czech Republic

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, given legal effect in Czech law, consists of some clauses which recognise the rights of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including sufficient nutrition, clothing, healthcare and housing (Article 11). Besides, Article 31 stipulates that "Every citizen has the right to benefit from free medical treatment and medical aid, as established by national laws" (ibid). For instance, the public health insurance embarks by the birth and permanent residence of any person, which is covered by public resources. However, a homeless person receives unequal treatment in comparison to the majority of the population because there is a problem related to the integration of this person into the healthcare system (Hladikova and Hradecky 2007). In particular, the homeless are sometimes refused the

right to primary healthcare due to the loss of their identity cards (only receiving help in the case of an imminent danger to life), or they are not covered by health insurance to refund the cost of their treatment (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion of the Czech Republic 2014). This situation is because there are administrative obstacles in legal regulations concerning healthcare providers and health insurance companies and related to specific medical procedures that are not reimbursed (*ibid.*).

6. General Policy Procedures to Approach the Problem in Poland and the Czech Republic

6.1. Poland

The phenomenon of homelessness is one of the most complex social problems that requires extensive efforts to be eliminated or at least limited. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, assistance to homeless people is mainly provided at the level of local government; however, tasks in this field are also undertaken at the central administration level. Firstly, on the initiative of the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, periodic surveys of the homeless have been carried out since 2009. Knowledge of the number of homeless people and socio-demographic data on them is essential to properly shape social policy and homelessness programmes. It should be added that: “The idea of counting homeless people was introduced by the Pomeranian Forum for Exiting Homelessness (PFWB) many, many years ago. They started in their municipality, later extended the study to cover the whole province, and finally their action turned into a nationwide headcount” ([Interview NGO 1 2019](#)).

Moreover, there is a central programme for helping the homeless called “Overcoming Homelessness” ([Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy 2018](#)). Its main goals are to inspire and support tasks related to preventing and solving the problem of homelessness. Innovative solutions and the development of good practices for entities working with homeless people are also essential. The programme participants may be, among others, non-governmental organisations ([Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy 2018](#)).

It should be noted that the programme, which has been followed since 2018, replaced the previous one. As a result of the analysis of information obtained from non-governmental organisations, the Ministry decided to change the programme and adapt its goals and activities to new challenges in the field of support for the homeless. As part of the implementation of the Overcoming Homelessness programme, 78 contracts with NGOs were concluded in 2018 for a total amount of over PLN 11 million (EUR 2.5 million). In 2019, 43 organisations received grants for a total amount of PLN 6 million (EUR 1.3 million) ([Interview MRPiPS 2019](#)).

There is no national strategy regarding homelessness in Poland. The municipality, as a primary entity responsible for helping homeless people, is obliged to adopt a municipal strategy for solving social problems. When analysing the Warsaw’s Social Strategy, it should be stated that the problem of homelessness has not been ignored, although it has not been given much attention. According to the document, Warsaw has its own homeless people, but apart from them, different groups of people who are helpless/lost or uprooted from their communities come to the capital. It is also emphasised that NGOs are an important partner in the implementation of social policy. They run various activating programmes, initiating forms of self-help and support, including excluded groups and the homeless ([Warsaw’s Social Strategy 2008](#)). It is also important that non-governmental organisations play the dominant role in solving social problems.

However, Warsaw is preparing to adopt new solutions in the field of homelessness policy. As one official states, “We are going to conduct an in-depth study on homelessness in Warsaw. The Warsaw study, a different one from the February survey, will give us a broader look at the problem, not only to correctly diagnose the causes of homelessness, but also to get to know the expectations of homeless people. Our goal is to make the system more efficient, so that a homeless person receives help and gets out of homelessness faster,

not being a customer redirected from one institution to another. The whole system is under construction, but we have already started doing new things and various projects that will facilitate a future departure from institutional assistance (...)” (Interview City Hall 1 2019).

One of the ideas which the city of Warsaw wants to introduce is called Housing First and was originated in Finland (cf. Duxbury 2019). In 2020, the city wanted to allocate 20 apartments in which homeless people with the history of homelessness could stay. Another idea is to coordinate the work of various entities, such as social assistance centres and institutions which are run by NGOs, so that an active help map can be created to cover the whole city of Warsaw. As one official highlights, the advantage of working with NGOs is that they are creative and have innovative ideas. One such proposal is a social campaign to challenge stereotypes about homeless people and to show inhabitants of Warsaw positive examples of getting out of homelessness (Interview City Hall 1 2019). These are just a few examples of the city’s new policy towards the homelessness issue. However, we will have to wait several years for its results. Thus, it can be stated that, at this stage, the system is still being developed, and the cooperation with NGOs is dynamic.

6.2. Czech Republic

In the past, the knowledge and understanding of the core causes of homelessness were limited, therefore no comprehensive social or housing policies functioned. In the recent years, the state has recognised homelessness as a social problem leading to social exclusion and has begun to approach the problem from different perspectives. The state provides financial resources to NGOs which offer assistance in the forms of employment, housing, social protection, healthcare and education to the homeless. As a result of this support, its recipients can cover the essential costs of living. In 2012, the Ministry of Regional Development, in collaboration with the MoLSA, had the task of drafting a legislative arrangement for people in housing need, as part of the Housing Policy Concept of the Czech Republic until 2020. Besides, the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion was designed, which emphasises the provision of social benefits to the unprivileged.

Another project aimed at addressing the issue was developed in 2013, when a group of experts in the field of homelessness cooperated with the Commission for Social Inclusion and worked under the MoLSA. The collaboration resulted in a comprehensive model of planning work with the homeless in ČR. The group intended to create “a strategy for preventing and resolving issues concerning homelessness” in the Czech Republic until 2020. The work completed by this group will be covered in the present paper, based on the interview conducted by the authors. The concept and the social inclusion strategy 2014–2020 was prepared to be presented to the government as part of a comprehensive social housing policy in the national reform programme.

The main objectives of the project were: understanding the scope of the situation, identifying the main stakeholders, assigning the goals and actions for effective implementation of policies, seeking tools for financing the implementation of the concept, and finally, the assessment of the undertaken actions. This comprehensive model aimed at minimising the number of people at risk of losing their homes, reducing the number of those living in the streets and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the system and related policies. Hence, the main goal was to limit the number of individuals who were at risk of poverty or those living in households without any person being employed, to 30,000 people before the end of 2020 (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014). The model proposed the following procedures: (1) supporting individuals willing to improve their situation to be socially included and return to a normal lifestyle, (2) creating a network of stable services for families and children, among others healthcare and employment services, and (3) broadening the range of social work to include the “Housing First” concept (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014). Regarding the funding, the government depended on the medium-term expenditure from the state budget and EU funds (ibid.).

The “Housing Ready” concept is a form of a social benefit that supports the reintegration of homeless people into society, increasing their ability to obtain and maintain their own homes and assisting them in solving their own problems at the root. For instance, social workers provide awareness sessions on the harmful effects of debts which severely limit the potential of the homeless. Prior to this undertaking, there was no social work assistance programme raising awareness and helping those who faced problems with paying back their commitments or finding solutions other than borrowing more and more money (Interview Czech Republic 2019). Moreover, social workers pay visits to people who recovered from homelessness, supporting them in living financially independent lives and to taking responsibility for their families (Interview Czech Republic 2019).

The “Housing First” model is the provision of housing as a social inclusion tool, rented with the budget of the social service NGO or the municipality budget (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014). However, due to the lack of available supported housing, NGOs are currently offering social services or social rehabilitation instead (ibid).

7. Stakeholders in Tackling the Issues of Homelessness in Poland and the Czech Republic

7.1. Poland

In Poland in 2016, local governments ran a total of 116 shelters, night shelters and warming centres, which altogether had 3695 places. On the other hand, the number of branches run by local government administration by other entities, mostly by non-governmental organisations, amounted to 247, with a total of 10,625 places (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of accommodation facilities for homeless people in 2016, broken down into entities that run them in Poland.

	Number of Branches	Number of Places
Shelters for homeless people		
- local government	45	1874
- other entities	167	8377
Night shelters		
- local government	46	1322
- other entities	54	1600
Heating rooms/Warming centre		
- local government	25	499
- other entities	26	648
Total	363	14,320

Source: own elaboration based on Sprawozdanie z realizacji działań na rzecz ludzi bezdomnych w województwach w roku 2016 oraz wyniki ogólnopolskiego badania liczby osób bezdomnych (8/9 luty 2017) [Report on the implementation of actions for the homeless in provinces in 2016 and the results of the national survey on the number of homeless people (8/9 February 2017)]. 2017. Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Warsaw (Report 1 2017).

It should be noted that statistics from 2016 included additional institutions, such as homes for mothers with children and pregnant women, crisis intervention centres and specialised centres for victims of domestic violence. In 2018, the statistics provided by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy were slightly different and indicated that in Poland, 126 out of 539 institutions providing shelter to the homeless were directly managed by local government units, 253 other entities were mainly run by non-governmental organisations commissioned by local governments, while 127 units operated only as part of their statutory activity, without public funds (Interview MRPiPS 2019). It should also be added that there are NGOs in Warsaw which assist homeless people without financial support from local government. Interestingly, however, they participate in the meetings of the above-mentioned Warsaw Welfare Council.

In 2018, a ministerial regulation of MRPIPS was issued, changing the forms of support for homeless people (e.g., institutions for single mothers with children are no longer included). Currently, there are four primary forms of support for homeless people: a shelter, a shelter with care services, a warming centre and accommodation ([Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Family 2018](#)). According to a representative of a non-governmental organisation: “the legislator’s mistake is that seasonal night shelters have been abandoned. Lodging houses must [now—from M.S.] be all-year-round, just as shelters must be all-year-round. In contrast, (. . .) the problem is that the seasonal heating now is a form of support with very minimal scope of service provision” ([Interview NGO 1 2019](#)). Therefore, there are discrepancies between the goal and the working methods of public administration and non-governmental organisations resulting from legal amendments. The goal is the same, to support homeless people, but the means to achieve it are different. The minimum standard of the service provided to homeless people in a warming centre is a sleeping chair, a basin and a warm drink. For an NGO that renders services for homeless people, this is unacceptable. On the one hand, NGO representatives understand that the city council does not want to pay extra for unnecessary services, but on the other hand, they do not want to give up the standards they offered, e.g., a bed instead of a chair or a full meal instead of just a hot drink.

As far as standards are concerned, while the ones of heating centres can be basic, the standard of shelters must be raised. According to a representative of the Warsaw City Hall, “It is with great concern that we observe only small changes in spite of the passing time. In the middle of next year [2020—from M.S.] we will make a tender. [NGOs—from M.S.] should have branches that are adapted to these requirements (. . .) The standards are strict, but they must be rigorous, so it is decent and safe there” ([Interview City Hall 1 2019](#)).

What affects the relationship between municipal government and NGOs is funding. Local government allocates the public money to assistance activities, also commissioning non-governmental organisations to perform these tasks. Formally, the procedure is that the municipal government invites tenders for a public task of providing shelter and a meal to the homeless. The task may be wholly financed by local authorities, which means that NGOs receive funds for the functioning of hostels. Regarding a practical aspect of this relationship, NGOs receive a grant for a period of 2–3 years. However, as one of the NGO representatives notes, inflation and the cost of housing and maintenance of employees increase during this time, while the contracted money does not change ([Interview NGO 2 2019](#)). The municipal government also notices this fact: On the one hand, the organisations want long-term contracts and cost estimates, so that they can offer stable employment for their workers, but on the other hand, if they enter into a three-year contract and the costs of its performance increase in the interim, no extra funds can be given. Money is always a touchy subject to discuss ([Interview City Hall 1 2019](#)). It should be added that Warsaw allocated PLN 15 million (EUR 3.3 million) in 2019 to the implementation of public tasks by NGOs in the field of homelessness.

7.2. Czech Republic

Various stakeholders participate in the process of homelessness prevention and minimising its disastrous effects, offering their own perspectives on the subject. Therefore, the members of the team responsible for developing the concept for the strategy against homelessness insist on engaging all of them in the process.

On the state level, the Ministry of Regional Development (MoRD) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) are the main representatives for the central government bodies ([Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014](#)). In particular, the MoRD is responsible for regional and housing policies, including their financing and distributing tasks between regional authorities, municipalities, towns, cities and ministries. The MoLSA, on the other hand, is responsible for (1) the provision of housing, employment and social care, (2) the design of medical

insurance scheme, (3) the funding of social service and social benefits and (4) awareness, involvement and cooperation between all the stakeholders.

On the regional level, these are municipalities which, following the decentralisation of power in the Czech Republic, are supposed to foster the conditions for the social service provision (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Unit of Social Housing and Social Inclusion 2014). This delegation of power can further the process of meeting the needs for housing, healthcare, social care, education and training facilities of inhabitants of each region, especially those at risk of social exclusion. As illustrated in MoLSA's policy paper (ibid) the state provides social security assistance, which encompasses contribution for housing, and assistance in material needs, which is supplementary housing payment and immediate emergency assistance. The social services are supplied to the individual as social counselling, social care services and social prevention services. They have a form of stay-in temporary accommodation in social service facilities, ambulatory services, or field services through an outreach programme.

Regional authorities and municipalities are obliged to collaborate to formulate a medium-term plan for the development of social services. However, municipalities do not have enough houses at their disposal for residents, especially for low-income residents, who are at the highest risk of becoming homeless. Another problem is the understaffing of municipalities, which affects the capacity of field research and communication necessary for socially excluded people to resolve their difficult housing situation (ibid). Moreover, regional authorities do not have the power over housing policy issues and are not able to influence the housing policies of the municipalities within their area.

The responsibility for offering social services lies not only with municipalities, but also registered social service providers, which have to cooperate with local authorities in order to find solutions to the problem of social exclusion. Table 1 shows the funds given to service providers and registered NGOs in 2017 by the MoLSA, according to a form of a provider and its number in the whole country. The non-governmental organisations which registered as social service providers have social workers helping people at risk of social exclusion. Hladikova and Hradecky (2007) indicate that the services available to homeless people in the Czech Republic encompass day centres, night shelters, asylum homes and halfway houses. These places mainly provide those in need with either short- or long-term accommodation. Other organisations are authorised to offer healthcare services for the homeless such as street medicine performed by qualified, well-trained field workers in emergency situations, professional advice and referral to secure professional medical help.

In a health centre, doctors treat remediable diseases among homeless people and isolate infectious cases to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to the others. Moreover, health centres offer medical care through doctors employed on a contractual or a voluntary basis, but there is only one centre that provides medical care through non-state health units under the control of the charitable organisation called Naděje. This centre is financed by the Czech Ministry of Health and the City of Prague. It has three departments, which are: (1) general practitioners working at the day centre, (2) fieldwork social workers who identify people in need in the streets and (3) a space with in-patient beds available (Hladikova and Hradecky 2007).

In addition, there are day centres that give social and legal counselling, support in issuing personal documents, help in dealing with governmental offices, as well as seeking a job and temporary accommodation. For example, NGOs assist homeless people with renewing their identity cards in order to facilitate further legal actions. The centres supply hot meals, hygiene products, clothing and arrange cultural and educational programmes. Preventive care includes food aid through a food bank, granting it to some social service providers. Halfway houses are mostly for young people who lived in orphanages until the age of 18 and people who have just been released from prison (Hladikova and Hradecky 2007).

As of recently, NGOs can apply for the annual grants provided by the state to local government. This process, however, leads to organisations lacking a fixed budget as they

cannot predict whether they will be admitted for the grant programme and how much money they can be given. Thus, the financial planning, as well as developing a long-term vision or a reliable strategy, is hindered or even impossible.

The Table 2 below presents the type of supported service provided to homeless people and the amounts allocated for this purpose.

Table 2. The data for the supported service provided to homeless people in Czech Republic in 2017.

Type of a Service Provider	Number of Service Providers	Amount of Grant in CZK (in EUR)
Asylum houses	66	CZK 126.7 m (EUR 4.9 m)
Special care houses	3	CZK 18.9 m (EUR 730,000)
Low threshold daily centres	35	CZK 41.2 m (EUR 1.6 m)
Shelters	76	CZK 78.7 m (EUR 3 m)
Social rehabilitation	7	CZK 7.1 m (EUR 273,000)
Street work groups in outreach programme	30	CZK 30.8 m (EUR 1.2 m)
Total	217	CZK 303.5 m (EUR 11.7 m)

Source: Interview Czech Republic 2019.

The interview was conducted with the spokesperson for Salvation Army NGOs about their collaboration with the MoLSA and municipalities. The organisation collaborates annually with the government by collecting data about the number of homeless people in the Czech Republic through a survey.

When asked about the collaboration between the MoLSA and NGOs, the interviewee stated that “the MoLSA is negotiating with the government on behalf of NGOs to assign a higher budget for NGOs as part of the annual budget” (21 January 2020). The main challenge faced by organisations in Prague is to sustain their budget and to obtain more funds.

8. Conclusions

To conclude, it should be noted that cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations in dealing with homelessness in Poland and the Czech Republic is intensively developing. In both countries, a positive involvement of public and private entities can be observed in this field, probably due to the complexity of the problem. Even though these relations are driven by a sense of mission to help the poorest in society, they face a number of problems.

For example, it is difficult for NGOs in Poland to adapt themselves to changing laws and requirements imposed on them by the legislator. Obtaining funds for social welfare provision represents another challenge. Financial contracts concluded for three years do not take into account inflation and rising labour costs in NGOs, which must find additional financial means for the full implementation of their task. Therefore, the engagement of the local community is essential, even in the material form, e.g., clothes or long-lasting food. The ESPN report indicates “that the financing of homelessness policies in Poland is very modest and that it has been affected by a gradually reduced participation of central government. Local governments, which bear the main responsibility for the financing of policies tackling HHE (Homelessness and Housing Exclusion), are faced with increasing unmet financing needs and increasing requests for support from the main NGOs operating in the field of HHE” (Baptista and Marlier 2019).

It seems that similar difficulties occur in the Czech Republic. However, what makes these two countries different is the level of involvement of public administration structures. In the Czech Republic, state administration is more active in shaping public policy on homelessness. It can be exemplified by the establishment a group of experts in 2013 to address the problem of the homeless in cooperation with the Commission for Social Integration, operating under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. By contrast, strategies on homelessness are developed in Poland at the local government level, and only supported by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy. It should be added that, according to ESPN recommendations, there is a need to build a national strategy to prevent HHE. It is important not only to focus on eliminating homelessness, but also on comprehensive solutions to domestic violence and housing shortage (Baptista and Marlier 2019).

As mentioned above, there are differences between the analysed countries, which makes it difficult to draw a comparative analysis. It is easiest to compare the figures, i.e., the percentage of homeless people in relation to the population of the entire country (Figure 1). In Poland, it is 0.08% (with the total population of 37,970,000 in 2019), and in the Czech Republic it is 1.77% (with 10,578,800 citizens in 2017—this year is given because the number of homeless people was estimated in the years 2015–2017) (Eurostat 2020). It can therefore be concluded that the problem of homelessness in the Czech Republic is greater.

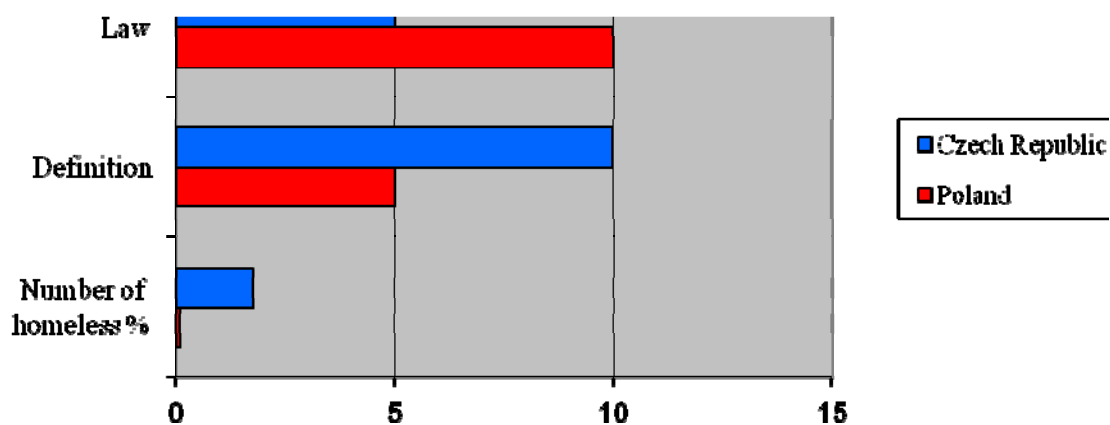


Figure 1. Number of homeless people, definition and legislation.

However, if we take another category of definitions, as shown in the Figure 1 and in Section 4 of the article, the Czech definition of homelessness is simply broader and more people are classified as homeless. Such a definition is recommended in the ESPN report. At the same time, the document states that the number of homeless people in Europe is growing (including the Czech Republic) in addition to four countries, i.e., Poland and Croatia with mixed patterns (up-down), Portugal, where there is stabilisation, and Finland, where it is decreasing (Baptista and Marlier 2019).

Another difference that appears is the legal basis. In Poland, it is stronger because the constitution has strengthened the citizens' right to housing and the obligation of public authorities to fight homelessness (which is why Figure 1 shows a longer scale). Moreover, in relation to the legislation in Poland, the need for cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organisations in social policy, including the problem of homelessness, is clearly emphasised.

The research material for the article was analysed based on the Najam Four-C's model, taking into account the goals and means (strategies) in relations between NGOs and public administration. It can be said that, for creating public policy on homelessness, the main goal will always be common—combating homelessness. In order to achieve it, various councils and committees are appointed to clarify specific objectives and define methods of their implementation. For example, in the Czech Republic, a group of experts was constituted at the ministry, while in Poland, the Warsaw Welfare Council was set up.

Nevertheless, local government administration, when commissioning non-governmental organisations to do a public task (in line with the subsidiarity principle in force in both countries), cannot impose measures on them. It does not mean that NGOs may not comply with specific standards, but that the nature of the non-governmental sector is different from public administration. If it were the same, the two sectors would be much alike. As one official emphasised, public administration must act within the law, while NGOs want to help homeless people to the utmost degree. This already indicates that their measures will never be the same. Considering the above remarks, it can be stated that the type of relationship that exists between public administration and NGOs in the implementation of activities for the benefit of the homeless both in Poland and the Czech Republic is a model of complementarity according to the Najam's Four-C Model. It means that the public and private sectors have similar objectives but prefer to choose different means for their achievement.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Najam's Four-C Model is interesting yet incomplete. It does not include other indicators that determine the type of relationship between public administration and non-governmental organisations, e.g., people's capital, the nature of work or financial resources. However, regardless of whether it is a complementarity model or an approaching cooperation model, it is vital to achieve a common goal. In this case, it is helping as many homeless people as possible.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.S. and D.A.; methodology, M.S. and D.A.; software, M.S. and D.A.; validation, M.S. and D.A.; formal analysis, M.S. and D.A.; investigation, M.S. and D.A.; resources, M.S. and D.A.; data, M.S. and D.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: The researcher Dina Abdelhafez is thankful for Charles University in Prague, as the work was supported by the grant SVV 260 596.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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