

**Participation and user organisation of homeless people and drug users –
Dilemmas, challenges and outcomes**

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WORK IN PROGRESS

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Abstract

People who are homeless and people who use drugs belong to some of the most vulnerable, excluded and disorganised groups in society. Chaotic and unstable living conditions often limit opportunities to engage in collective action or to form and consolidate interest organisations.

However, during the last decades, interest organisations of drug users and homeless people have been formed in Denmark with support from progressive professionals and actors in the administrative-political system. Based on case studies of two different user organisations of drug users and homeless people, the paper explores the experiences, challenges, dilemmas and outcomes of these user organisations' attempts to gain voice and legitimacy. Informed by these observations the paper seeks to identify some principles and examples of good practice that may facilitate participation of marginalised groups in the formulation and implementation of policy.

Introduction

A number of different groups of social welfare users have emerged and organised themselves during the last decades. Elderly, people with physical or psychological disabilities, patient groups, homeless people and unemployed people have organised in minor self-help and interest organisations to struggle for rights and improvements in their situation in society. This development has been seen in all the Nordic welfare states, and many of the organisations have, when recognised by the state, also been supported financially by the authorities.

This paper focuses on two particular interest organisations. The first is an interest organisation of drug users (The Danish Drug Users Union – DDUU), which was formed in 1993, and the other is an interest organisation of homeless people (SAND), formed in 2001. The paper relies on case studies of these two interest organisations. It seeks to explore and discuss the opportunities, dilemmas and barriers which these interest organisations face in their attempts to establish themselves as interest organisations for some of the most marginalised groups in society. Based on an analysis of the organisational strengths and weaknesses, the paper attempts to highlight some

experiences of good practice, which could strengthen and improve the organisation and participation by marginalised people.

Homeless people's and drug users' interest organisations basically face many of the same dilemmas as any other organisation that seeks to represent a group of citizens in the public. They have to decide on strategies, aims, how to obtain resources, who to co-operate with and so on. Interest organisations of homeless people and drug users face some specific challenges, however, because their constituency and activists belong to some of the most marginalised groups in society. This may limit the opportunity to ensure stability and continuity in an organisation. Moreover, organisations of homeless people and drug users face another challenge because they often are considered with scepticism or even suspicion by the surroundings.

This could be illustrated with the example of drug users' organisations. The illegal character of production, trade, possession, and (in some countries) use of drugs place drug users' organisations in a difficult position, as they may easily be taken as criminal and therefore illegitimate organisations. To avoid this, an organisation which seeks to represent drug users must frame their *raison d'être* from a human rights perspective, from a social political or a public-health perspective, promoting a concern and respect for the living conditions of drug users. They have, in short, to prove that they are 'respectable and decent' organisations.

In a Danish context it is a new phenomenon that homeless people and people who have an active and ongoing use of drugs organise. This paper is based on reflections from the empirical observations from studies of the two interest organisations. The first part of the paper provides a short description of the organisations and highlights the conditions which facilitated the emergence of the organisation. The second part of the paper goes closer into investigating the dilemmas and barriers of these organisations.

As will be noted, this paper is work in progress. It is primarily based on empirical insights. The theoretical frame, the arguments and the structure of the paper still needs to be elaborated. Comments are welcome.

Methods

The analysis of the organisation for homeless, S.A.N.D., is based on qualitative interviews with 16 activists at different levels of the organisation and participation in a number of meetings and discussions. Between December 2003 and June

2006, I participated in and observed 6 board meetings, 4 regional council meetings with participants from all regional councils, and one local regional council meeting. I also participated in 2 meetings with participation of homeless persons and invited staff from the shelters and staff from regional and local authorities. The analysis is supplemented by analysis of written documents from S.A.N.D.

The analysis of the drug users union, the DDUU, is based on 7 tape-recorded qualitative interviews with activists in the DDUU, and 2 tape-recorded interviews with the Parent Organisation that is located in the offices of the DDUU. The analysis is further informed by observation and informal conversations with activists or users in the DDUU during opening hours or in late afternoons, participation in celebrations of the anniversary of the organisation and other acts or meetings arranged by the organisation.¹ To this should be added analysis of the president's annual reports, internal minutes (called duty reports) of daily activities, and other documents from the organisation. I followed the activities in the DDUU from November 2003 to May 2006.

Organisation of homeless people in Denmark: S.A.N.D

The *organisation of homeless persons* - S.A.N.D. – is institutionally linked to the shelters for homeless. It is organised in a traditional representative structure. Like a traditional trade union organisation, the organisation of homeless is meant to have a representative at all places where homeless persons stay or receive some kind of services. These representatives then elect a regional council, which seek to coordinate the efforts and work in the regions. At the national level, S.A.N.D. represents the homeless in relation to national issues, and the organisation also provides support to the regional councils when needed.

S.A.N.D. seeks to represent all the homeless people in Denmark. The organisation is run by approximately 70-100 participants, who work locally, regionally or in the national board. The organisational work and pr-strategies are co-ordinated and carried out by two employed professionals.

¹ The organisation has been visited approximately 20 times, with visits lasting from one to five hours. After these visits, notes were taken, which have formed part of the empirical material for the analysis.

The overall aim of S.A.N.D. is to seek to counteract the causes and the consequences of homelessness.² This is specified in a mission statement and in six specific policy areas that are defined as particularly important to the situation of homeless people. First it is emphasised that S.A.N.D seeks to co-operate with relevant organisations and authorities to ensure sufficient assistance and help to the homeless and other excluded groups. S.A.N.D. strives to ensure acceptable conditions at the shelters and other places for homeless people. They seek to form and support user councils and they seek to ensure the election of representatives among the homeless who stay at the shelters. S.A.N.D also seeks to ensure capacity building of representatives and activists and to strengthen and improve the voluntary work of homeless people.

The mission statement refers to S.A.N.D's role in improving the understanding of homeless people's lives and conditions in society. S.A.N.D. has the ambition of becoming the mouthpiece of socially vulnerable citizens and opposing any form of discrimination.

The mission statement of S.A.N.D. is additionally divided into six specific policy areas which give an idea of the areas that are perceived as important to the lives and conditions of homeless persons: Social policy; addiction and treatment; labour market policy; housing and urban development policy; legal rights; and, action plans. These policy areas combine very general policy issues (housing policy) with more specific issues that relate to the particular conditions at the shelters (the use and formulation of individual action plans for people staying at a shelter).

The more specific formulations that are linked to policy areas attempt to draw attention to mechanisms that lead to homelessness and social exclusion. Moreover they emphasise elements of the present social policy strategies which are experienced as problematic or discriminating to homeless people.

The formulation of six major policy areas where S.A.N.D. seeks to formulate an explicit position can be seen as an attempt to creating a more developed and coherent action programme, which may unite members and activists in a shared understanding of aims and means. So far, the mission statement has not been transferred into specific strategies.

² The following is based on S.A.N.D.'s mission statement. See:
<http://www.sand.naerudvalg.dk/?p=principprogram>

Organisation of drug users in Denmark: The DDUU

The Danish Drug User Union (the DDUU) is based in Copenhagen and is the most important drug user organisation in Denmark. It was formed in November 1993, when a popular public activity centre for drug and methadone users was closed down. The organisation has 160 paying members and 387 passive members (Hansen, Malmgren et al. 2005). The DDUU is a formal organisation with elected chairperson, an elected executive committee, annual general meetings, by-laws etc. (Asmussen 2003). It is primarily an organisation for injection heroine users or people in maintenance treatment (for example with methadone). People who are not actively using drugs cannot become board members.

The overall aim is to represent and further the interests of drug and methadone users.³ Moreover the organisation opposes discrimination and it seeks to remedy powerlessness. It runs activities of support, information and advice. It works for exposing the social, political and economic conditions in the drug field and to uncover how these conditions affect the individual drug user. It attempts to generate debate, and it is stipulated that the organisation is dedicated to follow democratic means and practices to serve its interests. In the rules of the association it is also explicitly written that the organisation must be reliable in its relation to authorities, politicians and users.

In practice the work of the organisation is divided into two equally important areas. The organisation serves as a national interest organisation for drug users in Denmark and it carries out social work and functions as a drop-in centre (an open café) that is open to all drug users.

The activists carry out social work, advice and information. The organisation runs a newspaper archive with articles on drug related issues and it also has a library with literature on drug policies. Drug users seek personal advice on different issues and relatives to drug users also contact the organisation to get advice or information. Moreover, social workers, students, health personnel and others often seek information in the DDUU. The activists also collect used syringes that have been left by drug users at the open drug scene in Copenhagen.

³ The following description is based on the rules of the association, signed by the chairman 18 September 2004.

Many of the activities which are carried out by the DDUU are directed at gaining recognition as a useful, serious and reliable organisation, which carries out important social work to help drug users, to gain a better reputation in society or to inform about drugs and drug users' problems in the public.

Politically, the DDUU seeks to advance harm reduction initiatives in a broad sense. To the DDUU it is not so much the drugs which are the problem. The issues of importance are the life conditions of drug users and the ways whereby drug users are treated by society, the police and treatment institutions. The DDUU favours initiatives which are not legal in Denmark: It supports the formation of injection sites where drug users could inject drugs under secure conditions and with the presence of health personal. It also favours treatment or maintenance programmes with heroine. The DDUU claims that allowing these measures in Denmark would reduce the number of drug related deaths and harms significantly.

The DDUU has supported the formation of a similar organisation in Norway and Sweden and it has close contacts to other user organisations in Holland, England, and many other countries. The DDUU has a number of international contacts and participates actively in various conferences and harm reduction networks, e.g. NAMA (*National Alliance of Methadone Advocates*).⁴ The DDUU is also a member of ENCOD, which is a network of approximately 120 NGOs that seek to influence and reform international drug policies seeking more transparency and democracy in drug policy-making processes.

The emergence of associations of homeless and drug users

The emergence of associations of homeless people and drug users must be seen as an outcome of a combination of factors. I will point at four important dimensions, which may contribute to explaining the emergence of S.A.N.D and the DDUU. These are: 1) Different ideological currents that increase the interest in user involvement; 2) Support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and generally an institutional structure which is open for interest organisations to emerge; 3) Support from important actors in the field; and 4) The existence of a group of homeless persons and drug users who were willing and able to take up the challenge to form a user organisation (Anker 2005).

⁴ The chairman of the DDUU is international director of NAMA.

First, recent ideological trends of the welfare system are important to the emergence of the organisations of homeless persons and drug users. An increased interest in user involvement and user participation has facilitated the process. The category and denomination user is relatively new, and its introduction into the discourse of the welfare system reflects changes in the perception of the relationship between the state and the citizens. It also reflects the adoption of new technologies of governance, where the individual to a wider degree is perceived as a consumer – a user – who is responsible for his or her own life and also must have certain possibilities to choose from and influence the services of the welfare state [References].

However, the consumerist philosophy, inspired by neo-liberal ideas and new public management plays together with another trend that has also influenced welfare strategies since the 1960s. This is a democratic concern and a general tradition of decentralisation and user involvement which to a certain extent form part Danish political culture. This trend was strengthened as an outcome of the new social movements of the 1960s and 70s. Inspired by ideas of more horizontal forms of organisation, actors often explicitly sought to decrease the barriers between professionals, users and clients in alternative consultancies, tenants' houses and activities, women's projects, alternative institutions for children, etc. (Hegland 1997: 6). In this way, an alternative culture thrived, experimented and developed new bottom-up initiatives often in opposition to, but also allied with the administrative and political institutional structures.

Second, the emergence of the user organisations of homeless persons and drug users was facilitated by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Different Ministers of Social Affairs and civil servants in the Ministry strongly supported the idea of creating an organisation of homeless persons partly to provide an improved platform for advancing the policies for the most vulnerable groups in society.⁵

Both politicians and civil servants in the Ministry of Social Affairs have seen it as very important to have representative organisations of the most excluded groups. In this way, they have sought to create a collective actor, which could speak in favour – not only of the very powerful groups of disabled and elderly - but also in favour of until recently unrepresented groups of homeless and drug users.⁶

⁵ Information from interviews with present and former civil servants in the Ministry of Social Affairs.

⁶ This motivation was explicitly expressed in interviews with civil servants, social workers, and professionals in the field.

The sympathy for user organisations of homeless and drug users was inscribed into the legal framework, which stipulates that users of services from municipalities or counties must have the opportunity to gain influence on the organisation and use of service provisions. Moreover, the residents at the accommodations for homeless persons have a right to organise in user councils (Socialministeriet 1998:165). Additionally, resources were channelled to facilitate the formation of the user organisation. The Ministry of Social Affairs has from the very first point played a crucial role in facilitating and providing resources to the organisation. Since 1999, a centre focusing on homelessness and social work, has been explicitly involved in supporting and facilitating the user organisation of homeless persons. S.A.N.D. and the DDUU receive more than 100,000 Euro each from the Ministry of Social Affairs each year. As a local organisation the DDUU moreover receives an equal amount of money from the municipality of Copenhagen.

Third, the existence of allies in the field who supported the emergence of the organisations is important (Tarrow 1994). Often non-users have a strong involvement in the formation of user movements (Crossley 1998:657). Crossley (1999) argues that the mental health users movement emerged partly because of changes in the mental health field but also because of general activism and radicalism of the left and the middle classes in the 1970s. He argues that social workers and psychologists also had interests in challenging the psychiatric hegemony in the field.

This argument is also applicable to the field of homelessness and drug use. The initiatives of intellectuals and social workers in the field together with associations of relatives to drug users played a significant role in facilitating the formation of user organisations. These actors inspired and supported the formation of the organisations.

Fourth, it is obvious that the organisations could not have emerged without the presence of a group of able and dedicated homeless persons or drug users who were able to go into the work of the user organisations. This dimension is very important also to the viability of the organisation, which I will return to below.

Organisational dilemmas

The image of organised enduring associations of leaders and followers pursuing deliberately chosen strategies in opposition to others (Buechler 2000): 156) is not the proper illustration of the organisations of drug users and homeless. In fact what is most difficult to these organisations is to keep the organisations together. The organisations have problems with recruitment and stability and they also have difficulties with ensuring a manageable organisation. The organisations on the one hand have to remain open to their constituency but they must also create a room for participation, which allows the organisation to function. If the participants are too influenced by alcohol or drugs, or if they have psychiatric problems which limits their ability to engage in the daily activities with others in the organisation it may be difficult to create a place, where members enjoy to come and where aims and strategies can be developed.

Participants in the organisations often have limited personal resources stemming from their struggle to survive in hard living conditions. Many have specific personal problems, different kinds of psychological problems, addiction to alcohol or drugs, personal debt, unemployment, etc. In some periods, the intake of alcohol or other substances may also be a barrier to effective participation. Especially in S.A.N.D. it is not unusual that some of the activists or board members are unable to participate for a period because of personal problems or during periods of heavy drinking. Moreover the fragile and vulnerable state of many drug users or homeless people may limit the possibilities of taking on responsibility and a more active role in the organisations.

Yet it is not only the constituency's special situation, which may form a barrier to participation in collective action. Stigmatisation of homeless people and drug users is also a barrier to participation. Many may not want to organise as either homeless people or as a drug users, because it invariably associates the individual with a feeling of shame and personal failure. This implies that homeless people and drug users in fact may be more interested in escaping from the problems related to homelessness and drug use than to involve in activities which will keep them symbolically associated to the position, which they try to escape from. Many homeless people and drug users will see the situation of homelessness or the life as a drug user as a temporary rather than a permanent situation. To begin working in an organisation of drug users or homeless people may be inconsistent with this understanding of one's own situation. Moreover, if

people get a home or drug users stop taking drugs, it may be difficult to maintain their position as activists in the organisations.

The stigmatisation of homeless people and drug users in society also has consequences for the organisational efforts because the organisations are easily linked to images of untrustworthiness and lack of stability. Organisations of marginalised groups in other words have to make an extra effort to prove they are worthy, to gain recognition and to be taken seriously by authorities, staff and professionals in the field. The organisations must be able to function in spite of different levels of activity among their activists. They must ensure a certain level of organisational stability and continuity to gain recognition.

The cases of S.A.N.D. and the DDUU illustrate that it is possible to overcome the challenges, even if the practical solutions also give rise to new dilemmas. The two organisations have created different organisational structures and they have followed different strategies in their attempts to gain recognition and stability. These are described below.

S.A.N.D. and the DDUU: Two different organisational structures

S.A.N.D.

S.A.N.D. is a national interest organisation of the homeless in Denmark but in practice, it involves people who temporarily stay at a shelter for homeless. In 2004, the shelters had 2,540 beds and during the year approximately 7,350 people stayed at a shelter for at least one night (many of these for longer or repeated periods) (Ankestyrelsen 2005). The number of people who actually sleep rough (without a shelter or any kind) is not known but an expert in the field estimates that it is approximately 100 – 400 people.⁷ The shelters (approximately 65) are located in different regions and municipalities throughout the country. S.A.N.D. has a strong ambition of creating a representative structure with a net of representatives and user councils in all parts of the country. Every second month S.A.N.D. organises national meetings with representatives from the regional councils, where new activists are invited to participate.

The idea and the structure of the user organisation of homeless persons is influenced by a dedication to and an ambition of representative democracy. The

⁷ Interview with Preben Brandt.

democratic ambition is reflected in the organisational structure, in the process of decision making, the election of board members and in the education of activists. It is also entailed in the attempt to form an organisation with geographical representation from all parts of the country, and in the strategies and aims of S.A.N.D.

The legitimacy of the organisation is connected to the democratic structure of the organisation. Supported by the authorities, the organisation must comply with a democratic structure to gain recognition as a genuine representative of homeless persons. In other words, the support from the authorities tends to mark out a specific path for the organisation, which it has to follow to receive resources.

S.A.N.D. is led by a board of people who are staying or who have stayed at a shelter for homeless people. From the start, the organisation has been supported by consultants who have supported the process of forming an organisation, and in 2003, a national secretary was employed to take over this work. The board and the president of S.A.N.D. is the formal employer of the national secretary, who has an academic background. The national secretary is the co-ordinator of the activities in S.A.N.D. He is the one who co-ordinates the meetings, who take care of the practical arrangements and the person who seeks to follow up on decisions that are to be carried out in practice. In this way, S.A.N.D. has ensured that someone in the organisation is ready to take responsibility when activists occasionally are unable to participate.

But the democratic ambition of establishing a representative democratic organisation also means that a big effort is carried out to involve homeless people from all parts of the country. This strategy has some implications for the organisation. On the one hand, it means that homeless persons from different parts of the country frequently meet to discuss shared problems, new ideas and strategies. These meetings provide the actors with new inputs and inspiration and they open a room for interaction and empowerment. On the other hand, to unite people from different parts of the country take up a lot of resources, time and money. Some of the most dedicated activists spend many hours each week, travelling across the country and participating in different kinds of meetings. In this way it sometimes appears that more energy is put into keeping the

organisation together filling out the democratic structure, than in discussing aims and strategies.⁸

The DDUU

The DDUU has always been located in Copenhagen, where the problems of drug use are also most serious. The DDUU functions as a national interest organisation but it does not – like S.A.N.D. – seek to create a representative organisation with local branches nationwide. In practice, this means that the organisation can focus its efforts on selected policy issues instead of using resources to form and maintain local associations. On the other hand, the DDUU does not have the same nationwide democratic representative organisational structure.

The DDUU is generally speaking a respected organisation, which have gained status and legitimacy as a professional and well-functioning organisation in the field. This position is primarily gained from fulfilling a continued professional role in committees on drug use etc. Many of the activists are self-learned experts on drug issues. Much of the relative success of the DDUU is linked to the presidency, which has been able to build an effective organisation with a stable and continued effort (Jepsen 2004).

A few years ago, the DDUU thus had a seat in the national Board of Narcotics, where the chairman could participate in different working groups and bring forward the opinions of the organisation. The board was closed down in 2002, however, and the organisation thus lost an important platform for mediation.

The DDUU is an organisation driven by and for drug users themselves. The requirement of only letting active drug users into the board is meant to secure that the organisation remains controlled by the activists and members themselves. The issues of self-determination and autonomy are very important in the collective self-understanding of the organisation. It is not an organisation which is driven by or influenced by social workers – or others – who act on behalf of drug users. This creates a feeling of autonomy, a sense of being accepted among equals. The activists describe the organisation as a success, which is often related to a perception of self-reliance (Anker 2006).

⁸ Some actors in the field have criticised this development arguing that S.A.N.D. would gain much more from a more grass-root-oriented organisational structure with less coordinated and more spontaneous forms of action and protest.

In the first years, the DDUU, had non-users employed in the organisation. But after some unpleasant incidents with non-users who suddenly became too dominant in the organisation – the users decided to take the responsibility and manage the organisation by themselves.

The organisational structure of the DDUU, where the active participants are situated in Copenhagen, means that it is easier to create a more limited room of interaction for its activists. The DDUU does not have to use resources and energy on trying to overcome local differences and internal competition between activists from different parts of the country. On the other hand, its ability to be a true representative of drug users in Denmark depends on the organisations own capacity also to speak on behalf of drug users who do not live in Copenhagen.

Challenges

Dilemmas of participation

The legitimacy of the associations lies in their role as mouthpieces for the groups of homeless and drug users. More specifically, the two organisations are meant to forward the views and interest of a constituency which is often too marginalised to speak up for itself. This creates some dilemmas, however. Neither S.A.N.D. nor the DDUU effectively includes the most marginalised and chaotic people in their activities. In both organisations the norms of deviant behaviour may be defined as wider than in other types of organisations. Yet the organisations also have limits on which kind of people they can let into the organisation, if the organisation is going to function as an effective interest organisation.

In S.A.N.D. experiences with drunken people have led to the collective decision that drinking or use of substances at meetings is banned. For example at a general meeting a few people were speaking very loudly without listening to the talks and arguments put forward. These few people were in fact able to create a rather unpleasant situation, obstructing democratic procedures and interventions. In S.A.N.D. this type of incident is often referred to and discussed, and as an outcome it has been decided that drunken people are not meant to participate. People who have been drinking (too much) are welcomed again, afterwards, but if they are too drunk to follow normal procedures for respectful and decent behaviour, they must be told to leave until they are sober. In practice, it remains difficult to ensure how this norm can be followed, e.g. who has the

responsibility to tell people to leave. Moreover, it still remains open for judgement in the specific situation as some drug or alcohol users in fact are unable to participate if they suffer from physical abstinence reactions.

In the DDUU, the organisation confronts similar dilemmas, when people are very influenced by drugs and tend to fall asleep at the table in the open drop in centre. The norm is that people should be able to take part in activities or conversations when present. If they cannot stay awake they are asked to find another place to sleep.

To maintain an effective organisation, both the DDUU and S.A.N.D. thus seeks to define internal norms of conduct on how people should behave, when present in the organisation. These norms may exclude some of the most marginalised people, but from an organisational perspective, it may be seen as protective mechanisms that are meant to ensure the long-term survival of the organisation. In the DDUU, it has been decided that the organisation has an open drop in-café, where anyone can participate each day from 10 am to 3 pm. From 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the organisation is primarily open to the activists, the people who take active part in running the organisation on a daily basis.

Both organisations thus favour participation and action by activists whom are able to participate in planned activities. People who live a very chaotic life will not be included in the inner circles of the organisations and activists who do not show up to participate in planned activities etc. have difficulties gaining and maintaining a position as an activist in the organisations. Even if the organisations thus try to represent the voices of the most marginalised groups in society, they have not themselves been able to transcend the dilemmas related to creating alternative forms of participation. The organisations still require some basic social skills and competence of their participants.

Another issue of importance is related to the characteristics of the members and participants. In both organisations, the participation of ethnic minorities, women and young people is fairly low.

Openness and democracy (unfinished)

One of the challenges for S.A.N.D. is to ensure a sufficient number of activists because the activists' degree of activity varies according to changes in their lives. The resident councils, the regional councils and S.A.N.D. suffer from fluctuations of activity, which stem from the changing number of activists available and 'fit for fight'. The level

of activity changes and follows changes in the life situation of activists. When activists go into the organisation it is often because they have reached a certain degree of stability in their lives. Paradoxically, both improvements and deterioration of activists' life situation often leads to withdrawal from the organisation. If activists for example get serious social problems, health problems or problems of homelessness, it will often be difficult to uphold a high level of activity in the organisation. On the other hand, if activists simply begin a new life, with few or no connections to the field of homelessness, it will also be difficult to continue a high level of activity. Additionally, personal conflicts may also lead to withdrawal from the organisation.

The DDUU does not have the same need for recruiting new activists, as the organisation has and maintains a rather stable core of dedicated and active activists. On the other hand, the organisation does not gain a lot of new inputs or ideas from new members and activist.

When the number of activists is limited the organisational work easily comes to depend on a few active persons. Some of the activists in the organisations have experiences from former organisational work but generally managerial skills and organisational abilities are limited among homeless people and drug users (Cress and Snow 1996). When few people are actively engaged in the organisational procedures of the associations, it becomes more difficult to establish and sustain democratic procedures and practices and control with the management of assets. Both the DDUU and SAND have experienced problems with loss and theft, and especially at the local level, S.A.N.D. has experienced a number of personal struggles for influence and power.

Maintaining a democratic and open structure in this environment requires hard work and dedication. Moreover, the structure with meetings at local and national levels in S.A.N.D. requires the capacity to make plans and organise one's time. Some critiques have argued that it is a paradox that precisely the group of homeless people is organised in a representative and rather formal organisational structure, which somehow contradicts the very characteristics of being homeless. A more sporadic, horizontal and spontaneous structure based on 'here-and-now' activities could be an alternative to the structure of S.A.N.D.

Important lessons

The very existence of S.A.N.D. and the DDUU may be taken as a success and an important achievement. In this final section, I will point at some of the factors which may help explaining why the actors have been able to maintain their organisation and how these experiences may be used by others in different contexts.

Capacity building

It is impossible to create and maintain an organisation without some basic knowledge and experience with running an organisation. Attempts to form interest organisations of marginalised groups, will gain from developing programmes or activities of capacity building.

The case of S.A.N.D. illustrates the importance of working with a programme of capacity building to improve the activists' skills at a personal and organisational level. The professionals who supported the formation of the organisation explicitly stressed this strategy, which aimed at improving the activists' capabilities to negotiate, to give advice, to run a meeting, and to ensure transparency in economic procedures. The programme of capacity building emphasises the importance of increasing the competences of activists to enable them to fulfil the role as spokesman or representative at the shelter or in the regional council. Moreover, money and resources have been allocated from the Ministry of Social Affairs to this purpose. The spokesman-courses have on the one hand provided activists with a number of valuable skills to engage in organisational work, on the other hand, the courses have facilitated the creation of a space in which interaction among the activist and homeless became possible.

The DDUU has not in the same way worked systematically with a programme of capacity building. One reason could be that the organisational structures in the DDUU is more stable and the inflow of new activists lower. The president already possesses the necessary capabilities and the organisation does not in the same way count on the necessity of educating local spokesmen. On the other hand, The DDUU maintain a broad international network of contacts through which capacity building, strategic considerations, and evidence-based practices in the drugs field are discussed.

Organisational dilemmas

The dilemmas related to the partial exclusion of the most marginalised people from participation in the organisation of drug users and homeless people, raise the question of how, the organisation may ensure that they effectively speak on behalf of and represent the most marginalised people.

It is a difficult task to create an organisational structure which is open also to people with few human assets and capabilities. The organisations must be able to combine a role as effective and stable national interest organisations with democratic practices and openness. Especially at the local level in S.A.N.D. many examples are mentioned in interviews with activists on leaders who took on too much responsibility and afterwards left the organisation. Moreover, to actually represent the homeless people or drug users on the street, the organisations must remain linked to the reality in the street. This is an important challenge for the organisations, to actually know the problems of the most marginalised people, while also enabling an effective organisational structure which is taken seriously by authorities. However, if the organisations become too removed from the problems on the street, they also risk losing legitimacy as representatives of the groups they claim to represent.

Resources

One of the important lessons from the case study of S.A.N.D. is that with economic support from the state and the employment of a national secretary it may be possible to create a sufficiently stable organisational structure. S.A.N.D. has thus so far been able to consolidate its existence and position in the field, as the homeless' interest organisation in Denmark.

Also, the DDUU has been able to gain legitimacy and organisational stability with the support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and from the municipality of Copenhagen. As noted above, the programmes of capacity building or the development of organisational activities is only possible with a sufficient amount of resources.

Receiving nearly all funding from state agencies, however, also place the associations of drug users and homeless in a somehow odd position, because the associations become almost entirely dependent on the state which in principle is their counterpart. According the social control hypothesis (Cress and Snow 1996), external sponsorship tend to moderate SMO goals and tactics (McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1977) and this may create dilemmas on the strategies used.

The important point is, however, that resources are crucial to the success of the organisations.

A space for meaningful activity

Both organisations have been able to create a space in which homeless people and drug users feel accepted and find it worthwhile to participate. They have in other words been able to develop activities which are both meaningful and provide a frame for social interaction.

In both S.A.N.D. and the DDUU food and coffee play an important role as a natural element in meetings and social activities. Providing food and coffee entails a social element, yet it also provide an important element of health, which often lack in the lives of homeless people and drug users.

At meetings and gatherings in S.A.N.D. the atmosphere is almost always good and inclusive. New social networks are being formed through the activities in S.A.N.D. often between activists in different parts of the country.

With its more local basis in Copenhagen, the DDUU in many ways appears as a big family. Generally, the atmosphere is very inclusive, open and caring, providing a space for the activists to participate in recreational and meaningful activities. With the experiences of stigmatisation and mistrust that often characterise the efforts for and offers to drug users, the drug users in the DDUU emphasise that the organisation and its facilities serve as a place where they can breathe freely, without being met with suspicion and devaluation because of their drug use.

Institutional openness

To really understand the success with forming and maintaining organisations for homeless people and drug users in Denmark, it is also necessary to point to the opportunity structures (Naryan, 2005), i.e. the political, social and institutional structures which provide opportunities to interest organisations of marginalised groups. The institutional structure in Denmark provides a facilitating combination of openness and exclusionary practices towards homeless people and drug users, which provide both opportunities and incentives for organisation.

The official support and recognition of the organisations entails an important point of departure for improving and strengthening the organisation of marginalised people. The organisations are invited to give their opinion when new laws etc. are circulated among interest organisations for consideration, and members of the organisations are also given seats in councils which advice on drugs or homelessness. These openings for participation is very important to maintain incentives and beliefs in the importance of this kind of organisation.

Empowerment-evaluation practices

To improve the self-awareness on the importance of democratic practices and considerations over inclusion and exclusion of the most marginalised groups, it could be relevant to introduce and work with the principles of empowerment-evaluation (Fetterman 2001; 2005). Empowerment-evaluation refers to the use of concepts, techniques and findings to foster improvement and self-determination (Fetterman 2001: 3). It improves the capacity of the participants to reflect on their own practice, through teaching evaluation techniques. Empowerment-evaluation builds on principles of capacity building, community ownership, inclusion, democratic participation, organisational learning, accountability etc. (Fetterman 2005) which may all serve as important tools to the activists in the organisations.

Obviously, this still does not solve the organisational dilemmas but it may improve the internal reflexivity on achievements and limitations, which could improve the action repertoire of the organisations.

Conclusion (unfinished)

Even if the organisations face internal dilemmas and challenges related to their own procedures for ensuring democratic participation in the organisations, S.A.N.D. and the DDUU may be able to reach a group of people who are normally more reluctant to interact with representatives of the welfare system. Recent studies on the importance of drug user organisations thus suggest that drug user organisations may perform a critical public health function by providing care and support programmes that are responsive to immediate needs of their peers (Kerr, Small et al. 2006). Drug user organisations can in

other words serve as important intermediate actors – a tool for the welfare state - to reach some of the most marginalised injecting drug users (Anker, in print).

It is in other words worthwhile both to support and to study the initiatives of self-organisation among drug users and homeless people as they may open for new democratic practices and improve access to health and social integration for some of the most marginalised groups in society.

Litterature (incomplete)

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