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**Barbara Adamczyk,**

PhD of Humanistic Sciences in the Field of Pedagogy, Assistant Professor  
(The Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialization  
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow)  
basinia@wp.pl

### INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AS A PLATFORM FOR STREET WORK ACTIVITIES DIRECTED AT STREET CHILDREN

*The article presents the activities of selected international non-governmental organizations, which serve as a platform for street work among street children from Belgium, Peru and Canada. Street work with socially maladjusted children and adolescents who live or spend a lot of time in the street requires well-qualified and competent workers. Street work platforms promote street work in the world with an increasing number of street children. Although street work with various groups, including street children, is still not regarded a regular profession in many countries, all over the world new street work platforms are created in order to ensure the highest standards of street work. Several examples of such platforms are presented in the article, however, one might wonder how necessary street work networks are.*

**Key words:** street work, working in the street, street work platform.

**Introduction.** Addressing the growing phenomenon of street children requires definite decisions and legal regulations undertaken in the international arena. Institutions designated for dealing with this issue that first come to mind include UNICEF, UNESCO, the WHO and the European Union. The prestigious position they occupy and the role they play in the area of human rights protection, including the rights of children and adolescents, justify looking up to them in search of the most effective tools, which will allow street children in various countries to believe that the world is not indifferent to their plight.

The above-mentioned international institutions deal with the issue of street children from two perspectives: theoretical and practical. The former includes, among others, organizing conferences, symposiums and sessions during which the problem of street children is discussed and analysed in order to make the public aware of their existence. The latter is connected with providing funds for diagnostic studies in various countries, often in cooperation with local organizations, financing street work programmes, building educational, and resocialization centres where street children can undergo social re-adaptation.

Due to the fact, the phenomenon of street children is global in scope; a question arises regarding the efficiency of activities undertaken by these institutions. Without getting into details here, it should be underlined that the kind of help they offer, even with considerable funds at their disposal, will never be sufficient for total and complete reintegration of street children. To achieve this aim, an international street work platform<sup>1</sup> is necessary, whose objective will be to coordinate and promote the idea of street work with socially maladjusted children and adolescents. Its tasks should also include specialist trainings and formation of future street workers.

**The aim of the article** is to present the activities of selected international organizations from Europe, South America and North America, emphasizing the specific nature of their street work and the activities of street workers. These organizations include: Dynamo International (Belgium), Fédération des Travailleurs Sociaux de Rue "Coin de Rue" (Belgium), La Red de Educadores de Niños, niñas y Adolescentes en Situación de Calle y Riesgo Social (Peru), Association des Travailleurs et Travailleuses de rue du Quebec (Canada), Tous le Enfants de l'Autre Monde (Canada) and L'Université de la Rue (Canada).

#### 1. Dynamo International (International Street Workers Network)

Dynamo International (International Street Workers Network) is an organization created in 2001 in Brussels (Belgium) which includes 42 national platforms of street workers (the members of the network) from various regions of the world. It has two main goals: firstly, to perform activities for the benefit of children, adolescents and adults living or spending a lot of time in the street as a result of their choice or life circumstances<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, to foster cooperation between social, political and administrative organizations and street workers (educators). As Monic Poliquin states: "Dynamo International initiates and coordinates a platform for discussion for people

<sup>1</sup>Each platform should comprise at least 8 experienced street workers. It should be based on an existing structure (association, federation, collective). It is advisable for street workers creating a platform to belong to various organizations. The members of a given platform should meet at least once in two months in order to coordinate various international activities and exchange practical experiences with other street work platforms. (Cf. Dynamo International, *Międzynarodowy przewodnik metodologiczny po streetworkingu na świecie*, translation E. Szymczyk, Bruxelles 2004, pp. 94–95).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 93.

from various regions of the world. It also enables street workers to exchange practical experiences, information, trainings, and reflections connected with their work with street children."<sup>3</sup>

Dynamo International objectives are met through the following tasks:

- the protection of international solidarity through concrete activities directed at the promotion of sustainable development of a human being, including a street child;
- partnership understood as work towards and a vision of mutual and responsible respect for the identity of every street child;
- the promotion and implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* by encouraging state authorities to guarantee street children their basic rights, such as <the right to life> (Art. 24-25), <the right to an adequate standard of living> (Art. 26–27) and <the right to education> (Art. 28–31)<sup>4</sup>;
- making state authorities aware of the specific nature and requirements of street work;
- promoting social work in the street;
- solidarity between network partners;
- supporting joint activities in the local environment<sup>5</sup>.

Other activities undertaken by Dynamo International are aimed at increasing the efficiency and quality of field work through organizing specialist trainings for street workers and through developing professional relations with them in order to find the best solutions to problems faced by people living in the street, especially children and adolescents<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, International Street Workers Network supports projects directed at children and adolescents from various risk groups, including the ones living in metropolitan areas and in smaller towns. They are projects implemented in Congo, Nepal, Vietnam and Haiti covering the areas of management, finances, health care, and recruitment of new street workers, and their overriding aim is to develop an international network of cooperation aiding people who live in the street<sup>7</sup>.

The European Union designated year 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Dynamo International took active part in the events of this year by organizing "2ème Forum International des Travailleurs Sociaux de Rue"<sup>8</sup> in Brussels on 3<sup>rd</sup> November. Debates and team work led to the development of recommendations aimed at the improvement of the situation of street children. The most important of them state that:

\* All individuals, irrespective of their social situation, have the right to be recognized as rights holders and in charge of their own existence. This entails respect for all the rights enshrined in the Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

\* All individuals, irrespective of their social situation, have the right to a minimum of financial, material and cultural resources, which are necessary for a dignified and fulfilling life. All States have the duty to provide them with a truly secure life.

\* Social protection is a recognized human right (Arts 22 and 25 CHR). All States must provide a formal social security system which is accessible to all.

\* Social street workers reaffirm their profound attachment to peace and its ideals, which is the only guarantee for sustainable development. To this end they exhort governments and international bodies (EU, UN, African Union) to develop or reinforce all initiatives aiming to resolve conflicts that are factors contributing to tension, exclusion and impoverishment of vulnerable populations.

Aside from other proposals, there is reason to consider this set of recommendations as indispensable to the lasting improvement of the living conditions and actual circumstances of the people most excluded, who are accompanied by street workers throughout the world<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Fédération des Travailleurs Sociaux de Rue "Coin de Rue"

Fédération des Travailleurs Sociaux de Rue "Coin de Rue" from Brussels (Belgium) is another European organization functioning as a platform for street work activities. It organizes trainings for social workers and other people interested in street work<sup>10</sup>, thanks to which participants obtain knowledge and exchange good

<sup>3</sup>. M. Poliquin, *Vers une formation "signifiante" pour le travail de rue*, Laval 2007, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>. Cf. Rzecznik Praw Dziecka, *Konwencja o Prawach Dziecka*, Warszawa 2011.

<sup>5</sup>. Cf. M. Rheault, L. Gaudreau, *Bilan Annuel 2010*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>. Cf. *ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup>. <http://www.dynamoweb.be> (12.01.12).

<sup>8</sup>. See E. de Boevé, *Travail social de rue. Recommandations des travailleurs sociaux de rue contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale*, Bruxelles 2010.

<sup>9</sup>. Cf. Dynamo International, *II International Forum of Social Street Workers: "Street work, children's rights, poverty and social exclusion"*, <https://www.IIInternationalForumofSocialStreetWorkers.org> (02.07.2015).

<sup>10</sup>. Cf. after M. Poliquin, *Vers une formation "signifiante" pour le travail de rue*, p. 89.

practice from their work with street children. An example of a course offered by "Coin de Rue" is a course in ethical standards of work in the street run in a form of plenary sessions and seminars. It is aimed at promoting the exchange of information and suggestions between social workers and street workers from the area of ethical indicators of individual work of a street worker as well as developing skills of professional intervention in public spaces for people living in the street with other social services.

Social workers often work in dangerous areas, and that is why the Federation offers them support in a form of supervision. It is directed at street workers with many years of experience as a means of protecting them against a job burnout and an aid in developing effective tools of street work.

*Charte de la fédération des travailleurs sociaux de rue en communauté française*<sup>11</sup> is the main document of this organization. It defines street workers' roles and their rules. According to it, street workers play two complementary roles: they are educators providing social and educational activities, they are street animators and organizers of various forms of social, cultural and sports activities. They also strive to create the atmosphere of trust, dialogue and action, clearly define their role, status, and affiliation to the organization they work for and vow to keep the professional secrecy.

The document states that street work is based on four principles:

a) The community principle – street work activities undertaken by a social worker must take into consideration the complexity of the situation of people who live in the street. That is why social workers should try to integrate with those who live in the street and initiate and maintain mutual interactions.

b) The collective principle – street work activities undertaken by a social worker should provide support and company to people living in the street, e.g. street gangs, while offering them educational and resocialization programmes.

c) The individualism principle – assumes an encounter with a person living in the street who should feel accepted and listened to. A street worker must not stigmatize anyone but emphasize their positive features. Such individualized companionship should be perceived as a process leading towards liberation and self-sufficiency of a person living in the street. It will be possible only if a street worker takes into consideration the present situation, the past and the surroundings of a person she/he works with.

4) The institutional principle – due to close contacts with the reality of the street, another social worker's task is to inform and sensitize the public (including those who work in the area of politics, economy, culture, and sociology) to problems faced by people living in the street and encourage them to aid efforts directed towards social readaptation of the maladjusted.

*La rue, espace de vie*<sup>12</sup> is another important document emphasizing multidimensionality of street work. Firstly, street work is hard and demanding; street workers work in the street all the time. They should be a kind of a "link" between the street and various institutions. Secondly, street work is generally directed at the young, and that is why it is based mostly on animation in a given area. Thirdly, street workers accompany people in their local environment. Fourthly, as street work is defined as field work, it means working in public and private places, including bars and clubs, also the ones frequented by homosexuals. The document ends with a conclusion that, regardless of the kind of street work done, the underlying idea in all of them is the same, and the only difference lies in the choice of methods and techniques which should be adequately matched for the needs of a given group.

### **3. La Red de Educadores de Niños, niñas y Adolescentes en Situación de Calle y Riesgo Social**

The network of organizations promoting an integral development of street children and adolescents can be found also outside Europe. One of them is La Red de Educadores de Niños, niñas y Adolescentes en Situación de Calle y Riesgo Social (REDENAC)<sup>13</sup>. It was created in 1999 in Lima (Peru) on the initiative of street educators and public institutions in order to counteract social marginalization of street children living or gathering in the capital in such places as Parque Universitario and Av. Grau y ribera del Río Rímac.

REDENAC offers an opportunity for reflection on and exchange of street work experience, which allows street workers to address street children's problems both in the local and global perspective. It is also a place where individual street work projects can be implemented.

REDENAC works in three dimensions:

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Fédération des Travailleurs de rue "Coin de Rue", *Charte de la fédération des travailleurs sociaux de rue en communauté française*, Bruxelles 2000, pp. 1–3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Fédération des Travailleurs de rue "Coin de Rue", *La rue, espace de vie*, [https://www.google.pl-La rue, espace de vie \(02.07.2015\)](https://www.google.pl-La rue, espace de vie (02.07.2015)).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. after M. Rheault, L. Gaudreau, *Bilan Annuel 2010*, p. 20.

1) Prevention and global promotion – activities aimed at decreasing the number of homeless children through preventive actions undertaken within local communities in order to sensitise them to the plight of street children and promoting a holistic approach to the issue of street children.

2) Politics and local promotion – cooperation with local, regional and central agents from various areas of political life, non-governmental organizations, churches and individuals who are or should be responsible for improving tragic lives of street children in Peru.

3) Training and research – strengthening the ties with professionals, students and companies interested in problems of street children in the area of training and research.

#### **4. Association des Travailleurs et Travailleuses de rue du Québec**

Association des Travailleurs et Travailleuses de rue du Québec in Quebec (Canada)<sup>14</sup> is another example of a platform for non-governmental organizations dealing with street work. It comprises street workers and other partners from Quebec who work together to promote and develop various forms of street work in this region of Canada. It was created in 1993 on the initiative of twenty street workers, and now has about 200 members. It cooperates with *Regroupement des Organismes Communautaires Québécois en Travail de Rue* – an organization created in 2007 in order to diagnose the needs of people living in the street and strengthen street work in local structures. Additionally, Association des Travailleurs et Travailleuses de rue du Québec in Quebec is actively involved in the international arena by organizing meetings for pilot groups and editing the methodology of street work worldwide.

L'ATTRueQ has the following objectives: 1) to be a place where street work is studied and applied in practice; 2) to promote its ethical code; 3) to represent the rights and interests of street work in practice; 4) to support street workers in Quebec during their internship; 5) to encourage its members to spread information on street work; 6) to be a place of meeting and exchanging information between street workers in Quebec; 7) to propagate and organize trainings and continuous formation; 8) to cooperate with other non-governmental organizations engaged in the development of citizens of Quebec and to promote social justice.

#### **5. Tous le Enfants de l'Autre Monde**

Tous le Enfants de l'Autre Monde (TEAM) is another Canadian organization aimed at sensitizing the Canadian society, especially from Quebec, to the phenomenon of street children in various parts of the world. Its founder, Sylvain Fillion, describes its beginnings in the following way: "The idea came to my mind in 1995 in Guatemala, where I was taking part in a conference on human rights. It was my first contact with Latin America. Several days later I was invited to participate in a day devoted to street children in the Guatemala Ciudad park. This day determined and transformed my whole life. On this day I made a promise to myself to do something for street children. In 2004 my dreams came true and Tous les Enfants de l'Autre Monde was created. It is a kind of tribute to street children and adolescents. Since then it has been working towards the improvement of the quality of their life"<sup>15</sup>. The abbreviation of the name of the organization – TEAM – is an expression of solidarity with these miserable children and it also commemorates the particular children whose fate moved Fillion so deeply: T (Tuany) – stands for a young girl who worked in the streets of Lima and later as a street worker took part in the <Rues sans Frontière> project; E (Epick) – stands for a young girl from a small town in Nepal; A (Ahmadou) – stands for a young boy from Dakar in Senegal, who had lived in the street from his youngest years, and M (Manon) – stands for a young girl (a punk) who lived in Terrebonne in Quebec.

TEAM is based on several fundamental principles, which include: 1) enabling those who are interested to enter the world of street children living in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe; 2) organizing internships among street children, children – war casualties or extremely poor children; 3) facilitating the realization of street work projects or alternative practices conducted among children and adolescents in Quebec or other places; 4) decreasing poverty, promoting social reintegration, providing access to education, health care and other needs: material, educational, recreational, and sports for street children; 5) cooperating with non-governmental organizations in Quebec and other places with view to the long-term development and social transformation and 6) improving the quality of life of street children all over the world according to their needs, protecting their rights and fighting against poverty and wars<sup>16</sup>.

TEAM is the only organization presented in the article, which organizes internships among street children for future street workers. They last from several weeks to several months and allow interns to stay in direct contact with street children, to discover the mechanisms of their stigmatization, their life conditions, and the reasons why they become homeless. Interns bring material means necessary for care, education, and play. Internships are the most significant task of the organization, and interns publish their experiences and memories in the *L'Autre Monde des Enfants* magazine. On reading them, it becomes obvious that this experience allows them to answer two questions: how street children changed their lives and what street children taught them. The following

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <http://www.attrueq.org> (12.02.2012).

<sup>15</sup> Tous les Enfants de l'Autre Monde, *Bilan Annuel* 2010, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 8–9.



passages will serve as the best examples.

Youmé Lapierre completed his internship in Lima in Peru: "For me, street children represent strength and courage to continue the fight. No one chooses the place of birth nor the family. Street children taught me to appreciate what I have. They gave me love and joy of life. They showed me what real life means and that my little world, my little comfort zone and my little routine are only an illusion. Someone younger than me showed me my extreme poverty"<sup>17</sup>.

Catherine Michaud, a student of Collège Saint Jean Vianney in Quebec wrote: "I learnt a lot in Peru. I learned that I was even more spoiled than I had thought. I learnt that you should always hope that the impossible will happen. I learnt that it is impossible to change the world within two weeks. I learnt that street children smile in spite of all they had to go through in their lives. I learnt that wealth means not only money but much much more, what we have in our hearts. I learnt that poverty exists not only in photographs. I learnt that street children need someone who wants to listen to them. I learnt that they have a lot of love to give. I learnt that even people who do not have much themselves, who live in poverty, are ready to give everything they have to others. I learnt that street children will always remain children"<sup>18</sup>.

The range of activities performed by Tous les Enfants de l'Autre Monde covers all sorts of trainings, without which street work with children and adolescents would be inefficient and useless. In order to ensure the adequate quality of street work, Sylvain Fillion wrote a book entitled *Para Ellos una Quinta Estacion*<sup>19</sup>, in which he describes the reality of life of street children in a poor district in Lima and presents a detailed programme of street work. The book may be treated as a methods textbook, which can be used in education of future street workers.

## 6. L'Université de la Rue

Various public and non-governmental organizations presented above provide opportunities for street workers to share and exchange their experiences and methods of work. However, it is worth noticing that there are also other agents not connected with these organizations which are actively engaged in the formation of street workers, for example, tertiary education institutions, such as the university in Quebec (Canada).

On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011, l'Université de la Rue was created as a result of cooperation between the organization Point de Rue in Trois-Rivières and the Department of Psychoeducation at l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Phillippe Malchelosse, the head of Point de Rue and co-founder of l'Université de la Rue, explains: "Institutions and organizations in Quebec have problems with recruiting people interested in working in the street. Also, there is no university programme which prepares specialists in street work. That is why we thought about joining l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (l'UQTR) to create there a place where students could learn about street work and gain necessary knowledge to work in the street."<sup>20</sup>

Every university has its own objectives. At l'Université de la Rue they include the following ones: 1) to provide support to the training programme during the first cycle studies; 2) to provide knowledge and share experiences connected with working with socially excluded youths; 3) to provide an opportunity for unqualified street workers to obtain suitable qualifications and certificates and 4) to develop research tools, gather data and run projects useful for organizations working in the area of street work.

In September 2011 l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (l'UQTR) introduced a so called micro-programme worth 15 ECTS points for the first cycle students. It is aimed at street workers, coordinators, heads of institutions, supervisors and formators interested in and dealing with street work. The programme is a part of the activity of L'Université de la Rue<sup>21</sup>. It should be noted that selected courses are also available to students from other specializations. The main aims of this micro-programme include: 1) to obtain introductory knowledge on marginalized communities and the practices of street work; 2) to gain understanding of the specific nature of street work and 3) to practise analysing problems and practices of street work.

The presence of an assistant lecturer is a novelty introduced by the university. This assistant is an experienced street worker whose task is to support the lecturer's theoretical knowledge with his/her practical experience gained while working in the street. Teaching includes various interactive and reflexive methods, such as: multimedia presentations, group discussions, workshops, writing diaries/blogs, individual and group exercises, field trips, video conferences at home, role playing or simulations. The study programme at L'Université de la Rue covers both obligatory and optional courses<sup>22</sup>. The obligatory ones include, e.g. *Street*

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<sup>17</sup> Y. Lapierre, *L'autre monde des enfants vu par Youmé*, L'Autre Monde des Enfants (2008), no 4, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> C. Michaud, *Stage en soi Péruvien*, L'Autre Monde des Enfants (2009), no 6, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> See. S. Fillion, *Para Ellos una Quinta Estacion*, Lima 1999.

<sup>20</sup> B. Trahan, *Création d'une Université de la rue. "On veut transférer la connaissance avant qu'il ne soit trop tard"*, Le Nouvelliste (2011), no 5, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. Bacon, *Un microprogramme en travail de rue et de proximité*, Le Nouvelliste 2011, no 3, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. <https://oraprdnt.uqtr.quebec.ca> (12.02.2012).

work in the context of social changes, *Evolution and historical basis of street work, Contexts and conditions of street work*. The optional ones include two lectures chosen by students from among three different profiles: the support/management profile offers courses such as *Clinical coordination and supervision in street work* and *Management of unusual practical interventions*, the intervention profile offers e.g. *Ethical and methodological analysis of case studies in in street work* and *Accompanying in street work*, while the cooperation profile offers e.g. *Cooperation network between interested parties* and *Street work and communication*.

**Instead conclusions.** Although street work with various groups, including street children, is still not regarded a regular profession in many countries, all over the world new street work platforms are created in order to ensure the highest standards of street work. Several examples of such platforms are presented in this article, however, one might wonder how necessary street work networks are. The arguments supporting their existence are listed below.

1) Working with street children in their local environments requires the development of suitable joint goals, principles, methods, and tools used by street workers in various countries. Even though their selection is determined by the local contexts (cultural differences and a variety of street children's problems), the main assumptions underlying street work everywhere are a necessity, and these assumptions can be arrived at as a result of the activities of street work networks.

2) The efficiency of street work with children and adolescents depends on the professional preparation of future street workers, which covers both specialist theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Providing both is one of the tasks of street work platforms.

3) The professional preparation is necessary not only in case of future street workers but also in case of street workers who have been working for several years. Also they will benefit from workshops and trainings offered by street work platforms.

4) A network of social street workers offers an opportunity for both theoreticians and practitioners to meet, discuss, and exchange experiences gained while working in the street. The fact that members come from various countries all over the world makes their contacts especially inspiring and enriching.

5) Street work platforms are an important voice in the promotion of work with street children in the international arena. They can also serve as laboratories for international field studies.

As the final conclusion, it can be stated that, given the significance of street work platforms, more such platforms should be created in order to increase the coordination of activities directed at the improvement of lives of street children worldwide.

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### **Адамчик Б. Международные общественные организации как платформа для уличной социальной работы с беспризорными детьми.**

*В статье очерченно поле деятельности международных общественных организаций, которые создают единственную платформу для уличной социальной работы с беспризорными детьми. Подобные платформы создаются в разных регионах мира, а в данной статье представлены организации из Бельгии, Перу и Канады. Работа с социально неприспособленной молодежью и детьми, которые больше или меньше времени находятся или постоянно проживают на улице, требует как теоретической, методологической и профессиональной подготовки уличных социальных работников, так и обладания необходимыми навыками работы с клиентами на улице.*

*Именно платформы уличной социальной работы являются местом продвижения уличной работы как деятельности, необходимой для мира, в котором существует реальная вероятность роста масштабов явления беспризорных детей.*

**Ключевые слова:** *уличная социальная работа, уличная работа, платформа для уличной социальной работы.*

**Адамчик Б. Міжнародні громадські організації як платформа для вуличної соціальної роботи з безпритульними дітьми.**

*У статті окреслено поле діяльності міжнародних громадських організацій, що створюють єдину платформу для вуличної соціальної роботи з дітьми вулиці. Подібні платформи створюються в різних регіонах світу, а в даній статті представлено організації з Бельгії, Перу і Канади. Робота з соціально-неприспосованою молоддю та дітьми, які більше чи менше часу перебувають або постійно проживають на вулиці, вимагає як теоретичної і методологічної професійної підготовки вуличних соціальних працівників, так і володіння необхідними навичками роботи з клієнтами на вулиці. Саме платформи вуличної соціальної роботи є місцем просування вуличної роботи як діяльності, необхідної для світу, в якому існує реальна ймовірність зростання масштабів явища безпритульних дітей.*

**Ключові слова:** *вулична соціальна робота, вулична робота, платформа для соціальної роботи.*