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L'Hospitalet, a city located in the Barcelona belt, has become one of the axes of economic development that constitute the industrial heart of Catalonia, and a key element, with its own identity, in the metropolitan scenario.

Since 1989, the Municipal Police of L'Hospitalet has been applyng a community-police model, whose objective is to integrate its professionals into the social fabric so as to detect the problems existing in each sector, look for the best solution to each specific case and channel the resources of the various organizations involved to arrive to a solution.

The case presented belw is the result of the professional work of one agent who, via his full integration in the area where he was working, came upon the problems and shortages presented by such environment. Later, he appropriately channeled those problems and mobilized the rest of his Area Team members and specialized units of the Municipal Police, as well as some municipal services and other organizations involved, in order to reach the best solution of existing problem.

This is clear example of the problem-solving concept that the L'Hospitalet Municipal Police applies within its acting framework.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Toward the end of 1992 and throughout the beginning of the following year, an increase in the number of crimes took place in a given area of the city of L'Hospitalet. Thefts, drugs and fights generated a serious increase of complaints.

Two significant facts seemed to be at the origin of the problem:

1) On one hand, an important, sudden increase of North-African immigrants in a marginal area, rated as an industrial area, crowding together in just a few dwellings in a very poor condition.

2) On the other hand, the emergence in the area of some lawbreakers, drug addicts and small drug dealers, and other people in an outcast situation, such as beggars and wanderers.

The affected land belonged lo two administrations, the City Council and the Autonomous Community, and, due to jurisdiction problems, they were abandoned and undeveloped. The streets were not amde up and had no public ligting, there was no sewer system, and the rubbish collection and street cleaning public services did not work in there, as it was an industrial-rated area. The dwellings had already been expropiated under the Urban Development plans, or deserted by their owners. They lacked the basic services, such as tap water, electricity, a sewer system or rubbish collection, and most of the building structures were in a tumble-down condition.

As a result of such situation, the problems generated by waste and garbage left around in the streets, bonfires and scrapped vehicles, became worse. Moreover, there was an increase of sanitary shortages amongst the North-African population in the area, as well as some integration and racism problems caused by a lack of knowledge of the language and Spanish legislation. The number of complaints by neighbours associations and industry representatives increased, mainly due to crime and the feeling of urban insecurity produced by the conditions the immigrants lived in.

SOCIAL ASPECT OF THE CASE

Traditionally, there was a North-African group of people established in the area. Employment rate amongst them was fairly low, and these jobs were mainly in marginal tasks: agricultural or other sasonal jobs, or rubbish collection, normally during the night shift. Some of the North-African children went to government-owned schools in the area, but attendance rate was relatively low and, sometimes, there were serious non-attendance problems. They had a fairly regular level of integration among themselves, keeping close links with their culture, customs and religion. To prove it, they had built a mosque in one of the dwellings, well looked after and used as a prayer and worship centre.

There were two leaders in the community, a religious and a civil one, who were respected by all and regulated the affairs of life together. At the time police intervention began, the census of the North-African population in the area had shot up to 200 people, with some ups and downs as the site was considered as a passing through area on the way to others places. The newcomers spent most of their lime on the streets. They did not work or go to school. They created the problems peculiar to cultural confrontations: bonfires on the public thoroughfares, slaughtering of animals whose entrails were thrown on the streets, and so on. All that caused a degradation of the conditions in the area. Simultaneously, there was an outbreak of non-North-African lawbeakers, probably because they a favourable breeding ground.

POLICE INTERVENTION

Such social and urban conditions shot up the number of interventions of the Municipal Police in the area, at the continous request of companies established there, neighbours or the North-African immigrants themselves. Shortly after, the services of the Municipal Police were practically always required in connection with crime. The problem was in a process of degenerating towards an increase of citizens insecurity, of such magnitude that an intensive police action in the area became necessary.

The first approach was a classical one, increasing the presence of the police in the area with continuous controls. This was a mainly repressive, deterrent system, where the aim was to nip the problem in the bud by stopping quickly and effectively the increase in crime. It was decided to send to the area the members of the Emergency Unit, specialists in population controls, arrests, rescue and high-risk operations. This task force, with a total 15 agents, one corporal and sergeant as officer in chief for the unit, was reinforced by the presence of two patrol cars and three quick-acting motorcycle units, which were supossed to cover the area twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, until the problem was completely resolved. Such operation yielded some apparently satisfactory initial effects, but soon it became apparent that, as police presence was removed, the feeling of insecurity not only did not decrease but was actually higher.

WHO TRACKED DOWN THE REAL PROBLEM?

Soon an alternative proposal was presented by a member of the team covering the area. This specific agent with five years of experience, stood out because of his initiative in all his former postings. His evaluations were based on a detailed study of the area and its inhabitants, and his main goals were to make that feeling of insecurity disappear among the citizens and to achieve the social integration of such ethnic minority group, by acting, within the competence of the police, so as to improve life together in the area, working as mediators with other organizations.

Such agent prepared an action plan that he called "Ethnic Minority-Groups Integration Program" (PIME), which he volunteered to develop on a permanent basis, including the creation of a new police Subsector in the city, called S-42.

PIME was set in motion on June 20, 1993, with just the above agent assigned to it but having the support of ail his team, with the objective of beginning to establish a relationship with the neighbours, providing both surveillance and protection, and trying to optimize the available resources.

ANALYSIS

This agents suggested to the rest of the Area Team a new analysis of the initial problem, based on the following aspects:

Continuous presence of that agent in the area.

Constant dialogue and relationship with all parties involved as the basis of hall his field action.

Also, this agent got a better knowledge of the Arab culture, customs, language and religion, so as to get a better understanding of the concerns of this group of people.

In order to perform a correct analysis of the case, he carried a follow-up logbook where he took note thoroughly of all the activities and incidents. He also carried out a census of the population in order to know the human magnitude of the problem, and this as his first achievement, as there was a considerable amount of reserve and distrut when it came to providing any kind of information.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN (PIME)

Five basic routes of action were mainly evaluated for^the implementation of PIME:

1.- CITIZENS SECURITY

2.- URBAN DEVELOPMENT

3.- HEALTH AND SANITATION

4.- SOCIAL SERVICES

5.- CONTACTS WITH OTHER ENTITIES

In the ligths of the magnitude of the problem, the need for an interdisciplinary approach, with participation of different professionals, was considered. This approach required the existence of a quick, dynamic structure to co-ordinate all their efforts and to focus them in the same direction. In this way, that agent became, with the support of the rest of ihe Team, the body through which requests were received and responses were channeled.

DATA DISCLOSED BY THE ANALYSIS OF THE AGENT WHO CREATED PIME

The analysis carried out by that agent showed the existence of may social, urban sanitary and economic shortages, as well as a lack of co-ordination among all the entities working to alleviate such deficiencies.

a) Poor urban condition of the streets

Lack of asphalt coating, many potholes in the pavement that become large puddles after rain, faulty sewer system, much damaged public lighting.

b) Home-door rubbish collection

Rubbish collection municipal services did not operate due to the poor conditions existing in the area, such as lack of night lighting and fear of being robbed or assaulted. As it was an industrial-rated area, there were no containers available for home waste.

c) Deserted vehicles

The degradation slate of the area favoured its use as a place where vehicles were deserted, and they were scrapped in a matter of hours.

d) Scrap sorting

Some wanderers used the streets to store scrap, cardboard, bottles, lin cans, and so on, which they later sold

e) Floods

In rainy periods, floods both outside and inside the dwellings were constant, due to a lack of drain and sewer system.

0 High unemployment rate

Most people in the North-African ethnic group were unemployed, and the rest working in agricultural activities, rubbish collection or selling smuggled cigarettes.

g) Documents

Some of the members of that group of people were in an illegal situation, sometimes because of lack of information

h) Education

There was a low level of schooling in the area. Most people under 16 were not enrolled in any school and, among those who were, non-attendance rate was higher than 40%.

i) Health

Health problems amongst such group of people were very serious. Personal hygiene and food shortages, dirt on the streets and the illegal status of part of the group members increased the likelihood of catching diseases.

j) Financial situation

The financial problems of the inmigranls were related to their high level of unemployment,

k) Citizens security

Practically in every case, increase in crime was related with some of the above aspects. Crimes were committed either in the area or by someone from the area.

CREATION OF AN ACTION PLAN

For the development of an action plan, the agent whom it was assigned to prepared a four-stage system, each stage linked to the previous one, as they were not independent from one another.

First Stage

This was characterized by a continuous presence in the area and an intensification of the day to day relationships with the North-African group. It was based on learning about their culture and customs and preparing a census of their population.

Second Stage

Its basic lines were sustaining the First Stage, using its results to begin issuing reports addressed to solve some of the most importanl shortages, beginning to follow up on some specific problems detected

during the preceding stage, and fostering conatcts with entities and organizations that were present in the area.

Third Stage

Using the results obtained in the previous stages, work was done to co-ordinate the various entities and organizations in order to get a faster, more appropriate to specific needs response. Specific action plans were created for each of the problems being followed up.

Fourth Stage

It was characterized by a consolidation of the project and evaluation of obtained results. A system was created that allowed sustaining the action plan with a minimum cost and detecting potential deviations. Presence in the area continued to be the central axis of all actions.

WORKING STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION PHILOSOPHY

From ther veiy beginning, work was done with the purpose of helping such group of people to become integrated into the area where they lived. Therefore, the agent's action began by getting close to their cultural environment, from where he could detect more clearly their shortages, and he channeled the actions through the different bodies with jurisdiction in order to provide the required assitance. This way, the agent was recognized as a member of the community with the ability to see to their needs and provide solutions to their conflicts.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF AREA TEAMS

The foot-agents is at the base of the Municipal Police. Without this agent, the other units lack the necessary element to perform their task.

The function of the Area Team is to mobilize the rest of specialized units. These units, based on the information received from the Area Team, work on solving the problems presented before them, co-operating with the Area Team , working to support it.

All agents, in their respective geografhical areas, must, additionally to perfoming all conventional police activities, have a clear and thorough knowledge of how the City Council works, thus allowing them to use this superstructure for the benefit of their jobs and citizens' needs. They work towards solving the problems brought before them ot to channel them in the most appropriate way.

In order to develop this model, it is also necessary that the agents have a continuous contact with the neighbours, retailers, schools, neighbours and cultural associations, etc. In short, the agents must know their environment and make themselves known.

On the other hand, the Area team agents must become a source of information. But stagnant information is of no use, it must be caused to flow. For team work, information is of the essence; each component in the group must report to the other members the problems and solutions occurring in the various subsectors of the area, thus obtaining an overall knowledge, and therefore the problems and solutions of one agent become the problems and solutions of the whole team.

Each team has complete autonomy as to the working proposals and plans they put forward, but the final decision as to the execution of a plan lies with the team officer in chief.

Thus, team philosophy boils down to applying the following eigth points to its working system:

1.- The Area Team is al service of community.

2.- The Area Team is a professional service.

3.- The team's goals are to meet the requeriments of the area.

4.- The team must plan and evaluate all the actions to be performed.

5.- Presence of the agents in the area os of the essence, to know the neighbours and be known by them.

6.- Exchange of information is the best way for the team to learn about the problems of the neighbours, and for the latter to know the work being done by the team.

7.- The specialized units must work to support such Area Team.

8.- The features of team work are integrity, initiative, fairness, tact, tolerance and good judgment.