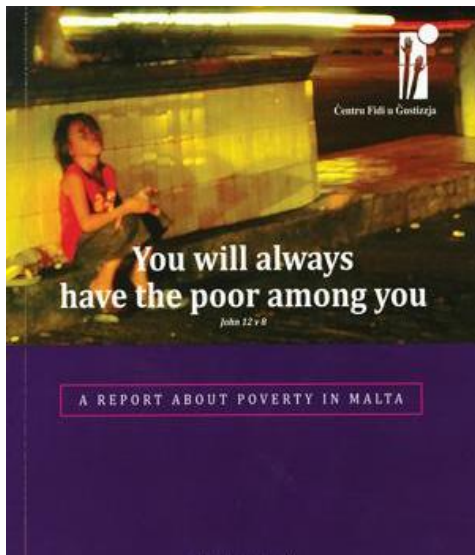


Social injustice and the materially deprived



Mario Cardona: 'You will always have the poor among you A report about poverty in Malta, Jesuit Centre for the Faith and Justice, 2010, 160 pp.

This report on poverty in Malta follows on the spate of discussions on poverty and social exclusion conducted in 2010. Commentators have noted that the discussion was divided between those who believed poverty did not exist in Malta, and those who insisted that it did, albeit in a different form from the plight suffered by people living in less developed countries.

Cardona sets out to demonstrate that absolute and relative poverty in Malta do exist, although not everyone wants to believe and/or is aware of this. Poverty in whatever form exists among 'insiders', that is Malta citizens, and 'outsiders', namely people fleeing their home country.

Interestingly enough, the focus usually falls on migrants from the African continent, and rarely falls on others deriving from other continents, such as Asia, Australia, America or Europe.

The first part of the report starts by delineating the objectives of the research project and what research methods and approach were utilised to attain these aims. Part two uses surveys the National Statistics Office has conducted in the last decade.

The author questions the efficacy of using the relative income poverty line as a tool to assess the extent of poverty in a country since index is an arbitrary cut off line, but he still depends on these surveys to delineate which social groups in Malta are more likely to suffer from poverty and social exclusion.

Quantitative research provides social commentators with general indicators of how many people may be at risk of poverty and which social groups in society may find themselves in this predicament.

This type of research, however, does not attempt to explicate why these groups and individuals may have to face material deprivation at certain phases or throughout their life.

This is done in part two, which analyses data derived from interviews conducted with service providers who work with those who suffer from material deprivation in Malta. These service providers worked in state, church or voluntary entities.

Those who dealt with the materially deprived differentiated between two types of clients – those who deserved help and those who did not.

Those who did not deserve help were those, according to these respondents, who were to blame for their predicament; the 'deserving' poor, on the other hand were those pushed into material deprivation due to circumstantial or situational factors.

The deserving poor were usually too ashamed to approach service providers. The 'underserving' tended to be quite cognizant of how the Maltese welfare society works, and what is available, and believed that as citizens they had a right to such benefits/services.

These two types of arguments were used by opposing sides in the national debate on poverty and social exclusion that took place in 2010 in Malta: those who believed the poor deserved to be helped, wanted to ameliorate the benefits and services provided; those who believed Malta was a scroungers' paradise, felt that the welfare system should be dismantled. These two trends of the debate are also explored in this book.

Part three includes the 'stories' of those experiencing material deprivation. As Cardona underlines, he found it difficult to find enough participants willing to speak about their situation.

The stories incorporated were edited in a way to illustrate and expound upon the main topics raised in the previous part, which inadvertently helped depict the service providers as the main definers of the issue.

This occurs in spite of the fact that Cardona sustains in various pages of the book that social policies and services should stem from the needs of materially deprived and socially excluded groups, and not from what service providers think they need.

The main concern of the book is social justice, because as the author insists, as long as "even one person is living in circumstances which do not fit his or her human dignity, somewhere an injustice is being perpetrated".



Times of Malta

Recommend

Share

Avatar

up for the wrong doer, back to the 80's.

Subscribe

Add Disqus to your site

Privacy