



'This is European Social Innovation'

"Aconchego Program"

Porto Social Foundation

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In the year 2004, in an old European country called Portugal, there was a City called Porto, where about 70,000 students attended higher education. A significant proportion of these students were from the surroundings of the city of Porto or from abroad. So, every year many these students were facing the need for temporary accommodation to attend the university academic year, and were permeable to real estate speculation.

At the same time, Porto was one of the cities with the highest number of ageing population, and there was a problem of loneliness and isolation of the elderly, especially in the downtown area of the city.

At the city there were two institutions: Porto Social Foundation and Academic Federation of Porto who were very busy trying to solve their own problems, high number of elderly and isolated people and high number of students living outside the city looking for cheap accommodation, respectively. These institutions found each other and decided to join efforts to solve their problems through a partnership.

Whereas one of the possible definitions of social innovation work is to make effective the available resources in the community and make them accessible, it was created the

ACONCHEGO Program. Starting with a two problem-situation, we ended up finding a single solution, with a "win-win" perspective.

This program is based on an intergenerational perspective. Seniors provide housing to university students in their homes and the students contribute, while living with seniors and sharing the same home, to decrease their feelings of loneliness and isolation, promoting the welfare of seniors and their families.

The methodology adopted to monitor the access of participants and the program development is the existence of a technical team that conducts home visits and telephone contacts, regular monitoring and evaluation of different integration processes. Regular meetings are held between participants to promote networking among them.

One difficulty in developing the initiative is to achieve better matching between the senior and the student and this task is performed by the team at the beginning and during the program.

Another significant obstacle overcome by the initiative is the balance of the demand for the program (either from students or seniors).

Over the years, the program gained its own dynamic, from the point of view of their members, meaning that, between 2004 and 2008, the demand was mostly from students and since 2008 the demand increased significantly from seniors. It is our belief that this phenomenon of reversal of the group's demand is due to the fact that this is a program of relationships where trust and security are key elements.

During these seven years of existence, the experiences of participation in the program were very rewarding. Nowadays, the promotion is word-of-mouth, especially among senior people. Seniors joining this program are from middle/upper class and autonomous. The students are mostly middle/lower class for whom close relationships and ties of affection can be places of safety.

This is one of the initiatives of Porto Social Foundation with more emphasis in the media and interest from other partners in other cities. It has already been replicated in Lisbon and in Coimbra.