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Challenges Faced by Social Pedagogy Academics in the Course of Participatory Action Research with Homeless People and Street Workers as Co-Researchers

Abstract

In taking the idea of participatory action research (PAR) seriously it seems necessary to change both power relation and epistemological perspectives. The basic research relation is perceived as bilateral, which means there are two or more subjects (sometimes collective) to be involved in- researcher and user/client- but most of interpretive research is focused on user perspective only. But there are more participants in the field who create social reality and produce interpretations "from the inside" (for example practitioners), and academic perspectives also plays their role in the process. So finally at least three viewpoints are needed to be recognized and scrutinized in participatory action research: academics, practitioners, and service users.

Designing the research project titled: *Onto-epistemologies of street social work with homeless people* our initial idea was an interpretive assessment to be implemented in the field of such street working. We have realised that there are two quite different discourses (theoretical and practical) being developed during our meetings with practitioners, and no liaison work to be done. Homeless users' perspectives being added a few months later made the reflexion more complicated.

The main objective of this contribution is to share challenges that need to be faced by academics in the course of PAR co-produced with street workers and homeless service users. The focus is on the problem of defining homelessness, power negotiations, differences in conceptualisations of assessment, and the position of service users in the research. Because PAR is also recognised as a way to make the process of knowledge creation more democratic, some political dilemmas and limitations are being taken into consideration as well.

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Introduction: historical and disciplinary context

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is usually presented from the perspective of its advantages and scientific or sometimes political benefits, in comparison with the more "traditional methodologies". In this chapter, the issue of this research approach will be presented in terms of challenges faced by academics, as we believe there is a long way to go between the idea of co-creation of knowledge and a truly participatory research practice.

The tendency to democratise knowledge seems to be now nearly global; however, PAR has its unique origins probably in every country it develops in. From the Polish perspective, what significantly contributed to this process was the historical and disciplinary context of the origins of social work at the beginning of the 20th century. This was the time when Poland regained its independence (after over a century of lack of sovereignty), which resulted in, amongst other things, subjective humanism of the social pedagogy initiated by Helena Radlińska and founded on the human-strength-based approach.

Despite this humanistic tradition and the later influences of social constructivism, over nearly a hundred years no one was able to develop a coherent model that would combine the humanistic theory, the interpretative methodology and subjective action (even though each of these fields has seen some interesting developments). In consequence, there is still discrepancy within contemporary social work between the humanistic approach to a user as a citizen, a political subject, and a person, and the same person as a "diagnosed" individual (who is passive, "objectively" measured, subordinated, and manipulated). The effect of the discrepancy mentioned (the social subject vs the diagnostic subject) is the search for new research methods, out of which the participatory approach seems to be one of the most promising.

Research project and PAR concept

In an attempt to eliminate the above discrepancy, we designed research applying the participatory procedure, with an interpretative angle. The basic characteristic of such a procedure is the "co-creation of knowledge by researchers and research subjects" (Jagosh et al., 2011), which requires ensuring democratisation of the research participation at all stages. Such research supports the empowerment of participants who, in a classical order, occupy a privileged position (Granosik, Gulczyńska, 2014).

It would be a considerable mistake, however, to reduce the inspiration to undertake participatory research to methodological issues or even locally co-organised actions. There is no doubt that one of its most significant

advantages is perceiving knowledge and actions in a political context as the users' right to independently shape their presence in discourses that concern them.

Our research team was interested in interpretative patterns that orientate professional activities of street workers[1] dealing with homeless people staying outside of agencies in big cities. Our attention mostly focused on the process of diagnosing problems of people supported by street workers and on actions connected with these assessments. A subject defined in such a way is related to our deeply held belief that diagnosis occupies a central position in social work resulting from the epistemology (cognitive patterns/assumptions) adopted by the worker. Adoption of a specific epistemology is connected with a definition of the problem (being an attempt to answer the question about its essence, reason, and properties) which, in turn, determines how work is oriented, and then how its effectiveness is assessed.

Participants of the research project described included service users (homeless people), street workers (practitioners), and academics-triangulated PAR. As the project used the action research model, it assumed joint discussions with street workers[2] that were supposed to reveal the onto-epistemologies of homelessness and social work, serving as a kind of joint diagnosis, i.e. the basic element of action. The service users' perspective was represented through biographical interviews with people experiencing homelessness, conducted by academics.

In this contribution, we do not describe our project in greater detail, because our aim is not to present any substantive conclusions related to the research questions. What turned out to be really interesting and surprising were conclusions concerning ourselves, our limitations, and challenges posed by the action research. We would like to devote the following pages to theoretical, methodological and political conclusions that were not planned but, in our opinion, are of significance, meaning challenges presented to academics and social pedagogues undertaking PAR, starting with definitional problems, through challenges in the course of the research process, and ending with political dilemmas and limitations.[3]

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[1] Formally, street workers are employed at the Municipal Welfare Centre, the basic governmental organisation providing social work in Poland.

[2] All discussions were recorded. Transcripts of these recordings served as the research material also used for the purposes of analysis carried out in this chapter. Service users were to join in the discussions later. However, as many controversial (mostly ethical) issues emerged in connection with their participation in the discussions, we gave that idea up.

[3] We do not include a methodological note, which is standard for scientific empirical analyses, because the conclusions presented below are meta-reflections on the course of the research process. However, considering our empirical experiences or even fixations, inquisitive readers will definitely identify some elements of conversation analysis, autoethnography, and critical discourse analysis.

Defining homelessness: barriers and opportunities of co-creating knowledge

The first challenge we had to face was the way homelessness is understood. From the academic point of view, it is not easy to define the issue of homelessness, which results from the abundance of literature that covers this topic but is, to a large extent, disorganised. This task is not made any easier by foreign literature referring to a reality that is much different from the Polish one, often describing as homeless not only those truly homeless but also those at risk of becoming homeless. The problem with defining homelessness is significant as the action model is determined by the concept assumed.

It seems that one of the definitional tools most frequently chosen by academic circles today is the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) (FEANTSA, 2008) developed by FEANTSA.[4] ETHOS is a proposal of a European conceptual definition, supplemented with an operational typology corresponding to specific conditions and character of different UE states.

In order to define homelessness in an operational way, FEANTSA identified three domains which constitute a "home", the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness. Having a home can be understood as: 1) physical domain – having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession; 2) social domain – being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations and; 3) legal domain – having legal title to occupation (FEANTSA, 2008). Depriving a person of any of these domains (usually more than one), results in homelessness and housing exclusion of the individual/group. Using this conceptual understanding of homelessness, FEANTSA adopted a definition of homelessness and housing exclusion based on four categories: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing. The first two refer to homelessness, while the other two to housing exclusion (FEANTSA, 2008).

This definition covers in detail the complexity of homelessness, offering clear guidelines about how to operationalise it in different local contexts. It essentially provides for the normative understanding of homelessness as a failure to fit into a specific order of social roles and to conform to norms adopted by the general public. Our local discourse on homelessness seems

[4] FEANTSA (European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless, Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri) is an organisation the aim of which is, broadly defined, prevention of and fight against homelessness, and elimination of its effects.

to be dominated by definitions based on characteristics the lack or presence of which distinguishes the homeless from other citizens, i.e. those based on understanding homelessness as minimisation of social participation (stepping out of social roles, deteriorating relationships).[5] Acknowledging the significance and role of such definitions, we believe that a normative definitional framework excludes any possibility of co-creating knowledge with service users as, paradoxically, lack of a common definition increases chances of opening the dominant academic discourse to the perspective of the homeless and practitioners.

Processual and interpretive approaches to homelessness are much closer to participatory epistemology; they do not define problems using *a priori* category systems, but rather a system of interrelated sensitive concepts. An example of a definition validating the perspective of the homeless can be found in the research by Małgorzata Kostrzyńska (2016). The author accompanied the homeless in their everyday life, managing to capture this phenomenon from the symbolic interaction perspective as a socially constructed process of producing the "homeless" identity within social interactions. In this understanding, the author suggests to resign from the notion of "being homeless" and to substitute it with "becoming homeless". The process is based on a mechanism of constant dynamic changes to the identity of an individual, which are consistently accompanied by changes in social responses to the individual in result of which a redefinition of both the individual's lifeworld's boundaries and his world division into "us" and "them" take place (Kostrzyńska, 2017).

Another variant of an interpretative image of homelessness is proposed by Magdalena Mostowska (2014). She believes that homelessness and marginalisation of the homeless can be analysed as an opposition between *communitas* and "social structure" proposed by Victor Turner (1964). It shows the manifestations of *communitas* in relationships within a group: an aversion to hierarchical structuring, a common language, physical closeness, reciprocity, intimacy, and rituals. External relationships are dominated by liminality: a state of social and cultural suspension, constant uncertainty, mutual fears, and marginalisation (Hopper, Baumohl 2004: 355).

Maria Mendel, on the other hand, considers homelessness in terms of Michael Foucault's heterotopia understood as "a different place" or "other spaces" of living. According to Mendel, the homeless – for example – regularly perform work that is highly useful in social terms, meaning 'recycling waste materials', which, however, does not gain any social recognition. "Their

[5] Examples of such ways of defining homelessness can be found in the following works: (Grotowska-Leder, 2005: 79–80; Wierzbicka, 1990: 17; Kubicka, 2005; Porowski, 1995: 434; Sołtysiak, 1997: 14; Florczak, 1990; Śledzianowski, 1997; Pisarska, 1993; Dobrowolski, Mądry, 1998: 24; Moczuk, 2000; Gramlewicz, 1998: 31).

work is not work (because it is located beyond the system; the homeless are not employed and they do not pay taxes because there are no jobs for them), while its performance is collectively ignored" (Mendel, 2009: 162). Exposing "other spaces" and "other places" created by the heterotopias of homelessness is a deconstruction of rituals sustaining the phenomenon of homelessness, and thus work towards their change (Mendel, 2007). This deconstruction, however, can only be accomplished by adopting the perspective of the homeless, which is a perspective potentially open to the co-creation of knowledge.

Thus, conducting PAR requires academics to reframe the theoretical paradigm for analysing different phenomena so that it is open to knowledge and activities of other partners (street workers and the homeless). A theoretical shift from a static, normative view of homelessness towards a subjectivised processual perspective may, to a large extent, affect practice. Instead of authoritarian activities based on the adjustment of users to the desired social model, activities that take subjectivity into account are undertaken. Such a paradigmatic change leads to a number of challenges, dilemmas and limitations on the part of researchers. The main section of our contribution presents the ones we experienced.

Challenges in the course of the research process

We mean here challenges experienced in the course of interactions between street workers and academics (and among the academics themselves) which were revealing different knowledge-power dimensions. They occurred mainly in the processes of negotiating the conceptual framework of the research and in research data analysis.

Challenge of power negotiations in the course of the first meeting

Power affected our relationships from the very beginning, which we saw in the specific way our self-presentations were built during our first meeting. Representatives of the research parties introduced themselves to one another, an element of which was a synthetic and situationally constructed story about their professional experience. Analysis of transcripts of this meeting allowed us to identify interesting regularity. In their self-presentations, representatives of each of the research parties included information about their experience connected with the area of expertise of the other research party. The academics exaggerated their practical experience, while the street workers referred to their experience as guest lecturers in higher education institutions, and they meticulously listed all the programmes and supplementary courses they had completed.

Basing self-presentations on the emphasis on similarities and differences in experience may be interpreted as an attempt to prove that we are equal partners who can understand each other thanks to a similar background. On the other hand, as the meeting took place at a university, this pattern may be treated as an example of how participatory research reveals a unique type of power: expert power based on a perception that a person has some special knowledge or expertise (French, Raven, 1959). The meeting became negotiation of status in a power-laden context: the academics were the hosts. Building self-presentations by the academics in such a way may suggest the weakening of their privilege arising out of their status of academic teachers, which does not contribute to the establishment of an equal standing of all members, as is expected in participatory research. The fact that self-presentations of the street workers emphasised their academic experience might be treated as an attempt to stress their position in a place that, due to its educational function, granted power to the academics, imposing the role of students on others.

The following meetings showed that while the references of the street workers to their academic experience had only been symbolic, the academics treated their practical experience much more seriously. The practitioners did not question the theoretical approaches introduced into the discussion by the academics, only indicating their impracticality in a delicate and usually indirect manner. On the other hand, the academics felt qualified enough not only to discuss different practical models, but also to evaluate and assess them.

What is also significant is the clear difference in the parties' involvement in action research. The academics' strong involvement, or even co-experiencing the process of helping two homeless people, was frequently accompanied by the fact that the street workers got to know the narrative interviews with the homeless very superficially. This led to poor involvement of the street workers in analytical discussions. Perhaps poorer involvement of some of the street workers can be explained by their sense of taking part in someone else's project as its bases were contributed by the academics, which determined the next challenge.

Challenge of power in setting the research objectives

On account of the street workers' confusion we could sense during research conceptualisation, this part of work was entrusted to the academics. This was contrary to the expectations of the latter, who had hoped for a joint reflection on the research concept, criticism of the methodology, and its adjustment to the realities of practice. It should be mentioned here that this is not an accusation against the street workers, but against the naive assumption of the academics about the methodological egalitarianism of

participatory research. What was also of significance was the imposing of an academic order of thinking about a research project, which starts with methodological issues. Perhaps the practitioners would have been more active had we started with substantive discussions (team case diagnosis/ work), only then moving on to methodological issues. In consequence, the research concept was developed by the academics and accepted without any reservations by the street workers as their participation in discussions about it was frequently limited to agreeing with the academics:

> A1: I also think that after you have read such an interview, it would be good for each of you to share your comments. Perhaps we should go last, otherwise we may impose too much, right? We are also curious about what interested you in the interview and what drew your attention as those who provide professional help (SW nods).
> A2: Exactly.
> A1: What was shocking? What happened? What made you angry? Anything new? Was anything confirmed? Would you like something like that? Would you agree?

The academics' domination was also revealed during the analysis of interviews, which seems to be natural considering the nature of academic work. The material quoted above clearly shows that despite the apparent withdrawal and waiting for their turn to the end of the analytical discussion, the academics structured its earlier part by asking a number of questions. For the street workers, analysis of narrative interviews was a new situation and they were only trying to accommodate themselves to it. During the analysis, the academics referred to concepts and theories that the street workers apparently were not familiar with. The street workers probably felt uncomfortable, as a result of which they started to question the value of the material gathered as contributing nothing new to their knowledge of the "case". The academics found it frustrating that some of the street workers openly admitted that they had not read the interviews.

Another example of the academics' domination was "lecturing" and teaching other participants during discussions about the interviews analysed. This tendency manifested itself in, for example, relatively longer utterances of the academics during the collaborative interview analysis or summarising threads which they (and not the street workers) closed in order to open new ones. This tendency was also revealed in concealed teaching taking the form of describing someone's activity as "a good example" illustrating a specific theoretical approach or – when discussing practical actions – showing the practitioners "how to do this (better)". An empirical illustration of this form of paternalism can be found in the following utterance of one of the academics who presented her method for obtaining resources to help others:

> A: You know what? I didn't get such an impression at all that it's a lot of work because this potential were people. I call and they do a lot of things for me, so to speak. I've had a network of contacts for years, people who can help me in different situations, and I just call them. Now there is X [a former student – authors' note] with a flat. I always collect

> information about who works where, right? (SW nods) Or from my husband when I go to an office party. And I know that she's the wife of this one, and that one is the wife of that guy, this one is running this thing, the other one is running that thing. And I can always revive this network, whenever I need.

The academics thought that the street worker did not use in her work a network of formal and informal support which, in their opinion, could be crucial. Thus, they decided to use their networks in order to show how this can be done.

The fact that the academics played their typical professional roles was (paradoxically) a surprising discovery which allowed us to learn something about ourselves, however, it was difficult to use the tension created by these unintentional status-related disputes in a constructive way, particularly considering the fact that we were not aware of this for a long time. It cannot be said whether the asymmetry of relationships during analyses and discussions was the only reason behind sometimes difficult interactions between the two groups, but it definitely did not contribute to the fostering of participation.

Challenges resulting from differences in assessment frameworks/ conceptualisations of assessment of the homeless between street workers and academics

During the project we made a false assumption that we shared with the street workers the cognitive perspective and the vision of the activity orientation. We thought that a similar educational background would result in describing problems using a similar language, and that it would minimise the differences arising out of the theoretical or practical approach to work with the homeless. However, already at an early stage of our discussions with the practitioners, we saw some differences. The practitioners' point of view seemed to fall within a paradigm that we called a normative perspective. The emphasis of this perspective is placed on examining problems with reference to a generally accepted norm (e.g. a medical, psychological or social norm that, in this context, refers to a universal idea of a "normal life"). Adoption of such a perspective by the street workers was, in our opinion, proved by the language of the case study:

> SW: I'm not a diagnostician, so I can't propose such theories officially, but now I'm starting to wonder; considering her appearance – and I know it's a very superficial diagnosis – I would say she might be FAS [foetal alcohol syndrome – authors' note]. She's got this face, you know? (…) Her eye sockets are quite deep, the jaw, I think, could also point to such a conclusion.

The street worker who categorised the client as a person with FAS, later during the same discussion explained her behaviour referring to symptoms characteristic of this condition.

The normative nature of the practitioners' perspective could also be seen in the prioritisation of the service users' needs and the way their problems were diagnosed. As a result, the street workers offered the homeless deficit-based forms of support that, in our opinion, frequently did not correspond with the needs expressed, for which we even found empirical "evidence" in the interviews conducted with the homeless.

Another manifestation of normativeness in the diagnoses made was extending the explanatory function of selected theories to new phenomena that are not usually explained by these theories, an example of which can be found in the following utterance:

> SW: In my opinion, it really brings to mind addiction and co-dependency, it is similar to what you're talking about, that she had to experience different things to move on, right? [to undertake some activities with the aim to get out of homelessness – authors' note] This is co-addiction to the street, isn't it? I don't even know how to call it, it just fell apart, I mean this X [the homeless woman's partner, with whom she had lived in a squat] died, and she suddenly saw different opportunities opening up to her, this is really diagnostic...

During the discussion between the street workers and the academics about the homeless woman who, after her partner had died, felt she needed to change something, one of the street workers used the concept of co-addiction, which is rarely used to explain reasons behind chronic homelessness.

One could argue whether the diagnostic hypothesis put forward is plausible, but this is not the subject of this discussion. The above example shows the logic behind a diagnosis, typical of a normative point of view. On the other hand, the academics' viewpoint theoretically validated subjective interpretations constructed by the homeless (even though, in practice, we also referred to different theories, but they were interpretive theories). To the street workers, the way the academics perceived problems was too idealised and difficult, and in some cases even impossible to be applied in the institution they worked in.

In consequence, where the street workers often saw "laziness", "mental disorders" or "helplessness", the academics found "strength", "the ability to adapt" and "an alternative lifestyle". An illustration can be the case of a homeless man we called "Nomad", who expected street workers to provide him with travel size products so that they fit into his backpack, e.g. a deodorant of a very specific size. The man also categorically rejected any help in the form of a council flat. We saw these expectations as a creative adaptation to the living conditions, while his lack of interest in a council flat as a slightly exaggerated readiness for mobility. The street workers saw symptoms of a mental disorder and a typically demanding attitude. It was similar in the case of a homeless married couple who spent their days looking for thrown away things that could be sold in buy-back centres (e.g. cans, paper, e-waste). Their daily schedule was full of places they

had to visit, and it was adjusted to the opening hours of these centres. We perceived this activity as a full-time job outside the state system, requiring expertise, knowledge, and experience, i.e. professionalism, whereas the street workers saw it as a typical "career" of the homeless, which made it impossible to perceive it is as a "job" or "resourcefulness".

With such great discrepancies between the interpretive patterns, it was difficult to refrain from judging the street workers' activities. We got the impression that discussions about individual cases were frequently limited to technical knowledge that made it possible to plan basic activities related to the identification of essential needs and the determination of the main, or currently most prominent, problem (such as a lack of a roof over one's head, alcoholism, mental disorders). In our opinion, this knowledge did not allow an understanding of the complexity of the process the homeless person was entangled in or the logic behind the way they handled the situation. It seemed to us it was then impossible to plan the support more accurately.

The "diagnostic deficit" made us realise that it was necessary to take into consideration the perspective of the homeless by including in the research narrative interviews conducted with them. However, the analysis of these interviews carried out together with the street workers did not go as the academics had expected. The street workers frequently emphasised lack of new threads as they had already known everything the narrators said. This was surprising to us because, from our perspective, the support plans developed by the street workers did not provide for biographical experiences, but focused on the most obvious symptoms that were often listed in institutional or even statutory recommendations. An empirical example is a situation of a young homeless "married woman" expecting a child. They were squatters, but the pregnant woman consistently refused to move to a shelter as this would require separating from her husband. For the same reason she became regularly discharged against medical advice from the hospital where she was taken due to her health problems.

According to the street workers, the woman's actions resulted from her pathological attachment to her husband and a possible mild mental disorder, which was why her ability to take decisions and their scope were limited.[6] This interpretation did not take into consideration the discriminatory behaviour of other patients in the hospital who, upon learning that she was a homeless person and planned to give her child up for adoption, stopped treating her as their peer. The fact that she wanted to escape from an embarrassing situation and to stay with her husband, who took care of her and accepted her choices, seemed to us reasonable when faced with

[6] The woman has never undergone any diagnostic test in this respect.

a clash between different ways of thinking and acting, and value systems (adopted by her and other pregnant women).[7]

As a result of this and many other similar discrepancies between the interpretations made by the academics[8] and the practitioners, considerable tension built up between the two parties. In quasi-private conversations (only between the academics, and not recorded), many questions were asked, and particularly: Why did the street workers orientate their actions selecting information in a way that was (in our opinion) unfavourable for the homeless? It was unfavourable on many levels, such as the assessment of motives (like in the situation of the pregnant woman who was discharged against medical advice), the assessment of behaviour (as an aggressive demand in the case of the already mentioned "Nomad"), or the assessment of mental health, which was nearly always treated as impaired.

In an attempt to explain the normative, frequently psychopathologising and psychiatrically-oriented perspective of the practitioners, we were even ready to reduce them to reactive elements of the institutionalised system. We explained their actions as resulting from the expectations of the institution (municipal social welfare centre in this case), which required specific responses to issues defined in different policies. In the street workers' diagnoses and activities we also saw the tendency to medicalise[9] social problems as the psychiatric perspective dominated the scientific and practical discourse on "normality" and "abnormality", as a result of which "activities are usually oriented towards the psychiatricisation of the case" (Jarkiewicz, 2016: 238).

It is difficult to summarise this challenge in a positive way as in the case of our project it turned out to be a barrier we were unable to overcome. From the perspective of the participatory approach, differences between interpretive patterns of academics and practitioners are not a problem; the real problem is a fixation on one's own view about social problems and activities that should be undertaken. This risk is particularly high considering the fact that participatory projects are frequently carried out by "involved" academics and practitioners (activists), who are emotionally attached to their beliefs and would like to change the world based on their own recommendations. Such a relatively closed perspective virtually excludes any possibility of a positive understanding of the partners' activities and – even more significantly – acknowledgement of their knowledge and competencies within their realm.

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[7] It might be worth noting that the difference in interpretations results from the fact that the street workers adopt a "medical" perspective, while the academics adopt an "emphatic" perspective. However, no one reinforces the voice of a homeless woman who repeatedly, not only in this situation, talked about her need to stay with her husband (who accompanies her nearly all the time) and the fears she experienced every time they were apart.

[8] It is worth mentioning that interpretive discrepancies were also present in the group of academics.

[9] Medicalisation is understood as "a process within which non-medical problems are defined and treated as if they were medical problems" (Conrad, 2007: 14).

The participatory approach is an opportunity to learn from others and to get to know their space of experience rather than to teach or show them the "right" way,[10] openness to other ways of describing reality, and readiness to co-create knowledge and action. It is a great challenge for academics, used to being listened to, as they believe they have already reached a higher understanding of the world, but also for practitioners who, unlike the "theoreticians", frequently over years, developed optimum models of practice and are not really willing to change them in any fundamental way.

Challenges based on different understanding of a service user's position/positionality in the case of conceptualisation

Different understanding of a service user's position/positionality is connected with the already described difference in perspectives the street workers and the academics referred to in their interpretations of the life stories of the homeless. The tension between the street workers' activity orientation and the perspective of the homeless was particularly visible in the already mentioned case of a researcher's over-involvement in helping one of the homeless women. In her work with the homeless woman, the researcher used cooperative case planning, key elements of which included the perspective of the homeless woman, her goals and plans, and assessment of her readiness to implement them. On the other hand, the street worker, based on her previous experience, wanted to control the pace of changes so that – in her opinion – they did not occur too fast. In order to do this, she proposed additional activities such as a consultation with a psychologist, who was to "objectively" determine whether there were no contraindications (mental disorders) and whether the homeless woman was ready to live independently in a flat provided by the researcher.

The tension described can be found in a fragment of a discussion on this case:

> SW 1: I could say something about it because at one point I even got angry with A. (A. laughs), because I told her "calm down, wait a moment, not so fast, you've only met her and you want to give her a flat, a job and everything, wait a moment, she'll meet you, she'll come, it's all right, don't go crazy, let's not give her a palace straight away. Because, you know, I had some objections, you know, this all happened a bit too fast. Later she called me to ask how long she should stay in the shelter, right?
>
> A.: I'll cut in because two days later she [the woman who was to rent the flat to the homeless woman] told me that the flat was ready.
>
> SW1: And I told A. to wait, wait, let her stay in the shelter for at least a week, give her time until Friday, if she manages until Friday, if she goes to work, call her on Friday and take her there.

[10] Of course, it would be unnatural to refrain completely from making any assessments, however, they should be relativised in terms of one's own perspective, and not presented "objectively".

SW2: In our experience, if something happens too fast, then it soon, in a moment, just falls apart.

SW1: I mean, you know, everything was going well but you just (...)

A.: Most of all, the only problem to me was the moral responsibility for her life. Why? Because if she was attacked by hooligans in a squat two nights in a row, what would happen on the third night? How did I see this? Simply, rescuing her first. And whenever it's possible, I do it as quickly as possible, moreover, if she didn't sleep yet another night, her heart would fail, just like in the case of this T or P [two inhabitants of the squat who had lived with X and died, with one of them dying of a heart attack – authors' note].

The model of professional practice developed as part of the previous street workers' practice and the interpretive perspective of the academics clash within a diagnosis of the same case. Such moments were difficult to go through without resorting to the elements of power in the form of references to different types of knowledge (professional and academic). The academic felt her perspective was treated as unprofessional, with over involvement and naivety of a novice. On the other hand, she saw the ritualised practice patterns proposed by the street worker as an attempt to muffle the perspective of the homeless and a failure to adjust the professional action pattern to the case.

Discrepancies in the acknowledgement of the service users' position constitute a particularly difficult challenge, and if the right to participate in the activity undertaken is questioned, they may become a barrier that cannot be overcome. It is worth noting that in the example provided, the status of the homeless woman was negotiated without her being present, and the academic only attempted to represent her interests in these negotiations. Even if such advocacy is successful, just like in this case as the homeless woman ultimately moved to the flat and started work, it is not synonymous with participatory action. One should think about how to combine the professional orientation of the street worker and the methodological concept of the academic with the preferences and plans of the user so that the action is based on a joint diagnosis and can be legitimised by all the parties involved.

Political dilemmas and limitations

The above challenges and limitations, though observed on the level of interactions, are mostly referred to in the macrosocial context, thus defining the political dimension of PAR. Political character is understood here broadly as all activities and processes that have an effect on the wider public mostly through organising and a(nta)gonising discourses that constitute the basic element dynamising contemporary societies. Such an analysis requires a critical source-based theoretical perspective as the

defence of the political character entails deconstruction of the so-called post-political vision of democracy (Mouffe, 2005, Chapter Two). This vision pervades today's dominant (mostly neoliberal) discourses, shaping a new format of knowledge based on indirect governance mechanisms (conduct of conduct), frequently (in the post-Foucauldian tradition) referred to as governmentality (Dean, 2010). A special role in this process is played by educational science by providing knowledge that justifies the neoliberal formation of the subject,[11] it enhances pedagogisation, i.e. filling the public discourse with targeted educational contents and activities.

The critical perspective developed here, despite being inspired by contemporary philosophy, is mostly based on an over-a-century-old Polish tradition of social pedagogy, which has always constructed practice critically oriented towards the existing reality. Without elaborating on the complex history of social pedagogy, it is worth mentioning that in the 21st century this criticism has, to a large extent, concerned political incapacitation of different social groups, including people classified as homeless, through their apparent disempowerment. In the context of participatory research, this means that, in the most general sense, knowledge is only to a certain extent co-produced by research participants. Within the remaining scope it comes from the dominant discourses the emancipatory activities are supposed to oppose, particularly considering the fact that these discourses are frequently the reasons behind the social exclusion of those who have problems functioning in a neoliberal society.

As the transformation of power relations (not only on the local level) is a very important element of PAR, the political challenges presented below refer to different governance mechanisms.

Power of educationalisation

Deprivation of rights despite apparent empowerment is often indirect (concealed) and based on such phenomena as conditional emancipation (granting rights and freedoms but only upon the fulfilment of certain conditions) and institutional mediation (the homeless cannot directly shape the discourse, they have to use institutional representatives).

Activities of this type can be associated with professionals (social pedagogues, social workers, street workers etc.), who place emphasis

[11] This mostly refers to the promotion of the personhood theory, education based on creativity, enterprise, taking care of one's own development and career, thinking about oneself in terms of a project and challenges etc. Despite the fact that within the Anglo-Saxon discourse mostly psy-disciplines, meaning psychology, psychiatry, and psychoeducation, are accused of creating subjects of this type (Rose, 1998), in countries where it was developed historically, pedagogy is the discipline that plays a crucial role in the educationalisation of the public space (Depaepe at al., 2008).

on the participatory forms of action, thus being unwittingly entangled with administering the political character of homelessness. It seems that these consequences constitute one of the most significant explanations for treating social work as a political activity[12], regardless of the involvement and awareness of street workers. Entanglement of all research parties in governmentality and pedagogisation is so high that the mechanisms mentioned are invisible to both those experiencing them (users) and those who spread (practitioners) or co-create them (academics). This is about such subtle influences as taking care of one's development (defined in terms of market usefulness) and independence (usually defined as a share in the labour market controlled by the state). The very term "inclusion", and, to a certain extent, also "participation", suggests that there is a "healthy" society and there are outsiders that should be included in the main structure (the dominant discourse) through education and an incentive system promoting active participation. As a result, instead of building one agonistically diverse society, one can yield to temptation and include the homeless in the neoliberal society controlled by the dominant discourses, where – with few exceptions – they will always occupy a place at the bottom of the structure.

Power of categorisation

Political risk in the context of participatory research is also manifested in its unintentional support for the discourse of homelessness, together with its whole institutional apparatus, whereas one of the first conclusions should be that such a diverse group of people cannot fall into the same category.

Even considering the biographical narratives of the homeless allows us to question the general category of homelessness, as the narratives indicate that the homeless do not form any clearly distinguished group.[13] Without presenting here some interesting conclusions from the analysis of the biographical material, we would like to point out that people institutionally categorised as homeless frequently have completely different biographical backgrounds and, in fact, there are more differences than similarities among them. Moreover, events in their lives they believe are most relevant are not connected with the lack of a roof over their heads. It is thus difficult to justify their joint categorisation and defining them in the context of "lack of home". This problem becomes even more significant when lack of home

[12] Hefin Gwylim, using slightly different yet also focused on neoliberal threats arguments, and even calls for the institutionalisation of Political Social Work (Gwylim, 2017).

[13] The research referred to in this chapter and observations of other authors (cf. Eliška Černá's text in this volume) show that from the empirical point of view the category of the homeless is groundless.

is accompanied by other lacking elements, virtually always defined in the language of neoliberal economy, such as unemployment, multi-level dependency (dependency syndrome), wasting life's opportunities, and neglecting personal development.

It seems that the category of homelessness does not have a descriptive function but serves as a tool of institutionalised general policy that aims unified activities at a heterogeneous group. This is why we only treat "homelessness" as an administrative category, i.e. a kind of political ordering[14], and not a characteristic of a real community (which does not exclude a possibility for some homeless to form communities, also with people who have a home). Thus, the very definition of homelessness is a kind of organisation and institutionalisation of the discourse, regardless of the fact whether it is defined in terms of a lack (liberal perspective) or the process of becoming (neoliberal perspective).

Development of the basic problem categories together with users and practitioners is virtually impossible in practice because it would entail a change of the research subject or even the political (discursive) and institutional context of the problem. In the research practice, as each grant, by definition, is connected with the topic submitted and its operationalisation, no changes can be made. In consequence, the issue in question is, to a certain extent forcibly, set within the dominant academic and institutional discourses, which frequently only slightly match the experiences of service users.[15]

A similar problem of forced location of research within the dominant theoretical and public discourses and the categorisation resulting from them concerns the participation of practitioners. They were also defined using the general institutionalised category of street workers despite considerable differences in the activities they undertake and their (axiological and technical) justifications. Some of them undertook structural activities closer to those of officials, others were more like social workers, and some acted like activists. As a result, the activity character depended more on the characteristics of the person and the way they perceived their professional role rather than their formal position. Moreover, on account of its institutional character, the research project might have not taken into consideration some very important yet unprofessional "social workers",

[14] In the philosophical discourse, probably the most radical interpretation of the effect of "administrative logic" on the shaping of the subject and the perception of the social life is constructed by Gilles Delueze and Félix Guattari (1987: 208–231).

[15] The issue of lack of influence of users on the research subject was one of the reasons for promoting "user-led research" by Peter Beresford. Naturally, such a solution is only partial because of the need to fit into the popular scientific discourse requires certain orientation and references.

such as passers-by, owners of flats temporarily occupied by users, their parents etc.

It is easy to imagine a similar criticism of the category of academics, with their discourses of different scientific disciplines.

Discursive institutionalisation

The political character of participatory research also manifests itself on the institutional level. One of the aims of our research was to promote street work, which seemed to be an underestimated specialisation within the organisational structure of social welfare centres. After some time, however, we realised that – just like in the case of the homeless – the general category of street workers, due to its numerous internal differences, is groundless. Despite these critical conclusions, the project we were carrying out unwillingly thickened and focused the institutional discourse on the few street workers employed in the institution. Thus, regardless of the researchers' level of awareness, each project affects institutions it concerns in a way that is difficult to predict. However, in this context, participatory research has a special meaning. In the category of new discursive institutionalism, this effect may be called transformation of the network governance (Sørensen, Torfing, 2005) by distorting the division between the internal discourse (usually concerning procedures and adopted when there is no one "from the outside") and the external discourse (set within the dominant discourse and adopted in the presence of persons from outside the institution) (Granosik, 2014). This division is mostly aimed at protecting the autonomy of the profession, which can thus distance itself from the omnipresent discursive control, however, it also protects users from the formatting influence of the neoliberal educational discourse. Thanks to this they can live quite freely in a system based on rewards and punishments of the disciplinarian power, the advantage of which is that it is visible and can be opposed.

The presence of academics results in a considerable loss of the internal discourse as street workers try to refer to the dominant discourses that are usually only apparently empowering. Using an advanced methodology (Critical Discourse Analysis), one may reconstruct this shift, but considering the academic origin of the method, this would exclude the participatory research model.

In the context of the arguments presented herein, refusal to take part or limited participation of users can be treated as an intuitive defence against political consequences of a seemingly unimportant decision to talk to academics and street workers about their affairs. For the users, this means moving considerably the boundary between public and private spheres, which is the more visible the more socially isolated their community is.

Risk of legitimising the dominant discourse

As it was already mentioned, the very choice of the research subject sets it within the dominant discourses that we, academics, and grant providing organisations believe to be important. This process, however, goes much further. Not only are the research course and results structured in a discursive (political) way but also, through research, these discourses enter the social worlds of users and practitioners. To some extent, they colonise them, requiring references to categories and systems of thinking indicated by researchers. Moreover, particularly in connection with practitioners, such colonisation is often interpreted positively as "the impulse for development", "inspiration for reflection" and "understanding/ interpretive diagnosis".

If these inspirations were mutual and not oriented towards the ultimate "admitting that one is right/proving one is right, this would be a kind of an arrangement between theory and practice, however, the hegemony of the academic discourse, with its pressure on moral imperatives, prevents it from/hinders justification of other approaches (e.g. more disciplinarian ones). There are simply no language or logical structures that could be used to defend normative or routine actions.[16]

Discursive colonisation may affect service users even more. Not only are their very diverse biographical experiences transformed within one discourse (homelessness), but, on account of the activating form of the research, they are supposed to take part in the process, thus legitimising it.[17] It could be said that they get the possibility to speak up, however, considering all the structuring factors (the initial topic selection, the form of participation arising out of the methodology as well as utterances, standards of reasoning and drawing up reports, and academic publications in an unfamiliar linguistic code), this might be illusory. Moreover, the homeless, and, to a certain extent, also street workers and academics, are not aware of the political significance of the research, so do they know what they agree to? Can one participate in something (actually co-creating it) without knowing about it?

Thus, one might suspect that the considerable increase in the popularity of PAR over the last few years has been, at least to a certain extent, a result of the change in the role this approach plays[18]: from the emancipatory one

[16] We are not going to decide which practical orientation is better. We would only like to state that action models different from the academic ones had no chance of getting revealed as a result of their confrontation with the idealising academic vision. In such a context, any other view seems to be a dehumanising reification of the homeless.

[17] One of the authors writing about the use of the participatory approach to diminish the political responsibility of decision-makers is Jane Fook (2006).

[18] The issue of a role change in the context of participatory social work is addressed by Marek Czyżewski (in this volume).

to an influence of the mechanisms for governing the population. These mechanisms do not work in communities that, due to a lack of interest in the public discourse, cannot be subject to its power; one needs to send an academic who – unconsciously and usually in good faith – will establish a connection.

Conclusions

The critical reflection on PAR presented in the chapter is not directed against this approach. On the contrary, it is consistent with the call for more participatory research, indicating that its "weak" variants are at risk of counterproductivity. On the other hand, its "strong" variants, including advanced participation and awareness of the risk of disturbing the balance of power relations, may turn out to be the only contemporary forms of (radical, agonistic) democracy available to communities excluded from its deliberative forms. However, in order to undertake such radical participatory research, some preparation is necessary as the weakest elements of the participatory team are usually academics (on account of their attachment to methods, power, being listened to etc.).

It seems that this "lack of preparation" requires some initial activities that might include:

- Work on the distance from one's own theoretical, methodological and action-related preferences as well as openness to other points of view;
- Identification of the onto-epistemologies of future co-researchers (interpretive diagnosis/assessment: Granosik, 2014a), and mostly their ethnomethods for examining social reality so that they can be combined with other epistemological perspectives, including the discipline represented by the academics;
- Identification (demystification) of concealed, frequently structural, discursive mechanisms of power (socio-diagnostic critique: Wodak, 2015);
- Getting to know institutional discourses and their relationships with the dominant discourses, particularly if the project is carried out with practitioners.

The aim of all these activities is not to prepare a better-thought-out research concept, which should be constructed with other participants, but to increase the academics' awareness of who they are, what social space they are about to enter, and why.

Equipped with the above diagnoses, a researcher needs to feel the risk of using PAR as a tool for governing the population. One cannot forget about

the risk of unconsciously leading users to the area of discursive power, which they stand no chance of handling. However, such risks cannot hinder actions; they should make them more careful, with critical awareness as the best protection against such abuse.

Despite the common belief that the effect of PAR should be co-created knowledge, it is worth assuming that its effect does not always have to involve co-production. Particularly when the diversity of social worlds is high (as in the case of homelessness), any expectation to fit in with one discourse would have to entail some form of colonisation of one of the partners (parties). It seems that a far more democratic solution is to record different, agonistic perspectives, because some differences cannot be settled, while democracy only exists as long as there are different views, and unanimity is more characteristic of hegemony (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985).

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