Participatory Social Work: Research, Practice, Education

editors
Mariusz Granosik, Anita Gulczyńska,
Małgorzata Kostrzyńska, Brian Littlechild

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MARIUSZ GRANOSIK*, ANITA GULCZYŃSKA*,
MAŁGORZATA KOSTRZYŃSKA*, BRIAN LITTLECHILD**

Here We Are: Our Journey to Participatory Research

The book you are holding has taken a long time to compile, and is a result of a complex process that has led our thinking about participatory research in social work to this very place. This process explains to a large extent the structure of the publication and its diversity, even though we did not plan for it and it came as a surprise, which is why it is now worth devoting some introductory pages to it.

We need to start by stating that the history of empowerment of research participants, usually service users, was in each of our cases different, but the individual differences mostly arise from the location in two empirical cultural traditions: Polish and British.

The sources of Polish inspirations for a monograph devoted to participatory research can be traced back to the activity of the European Resource Centre for Social Work Research (CERTS). More than ten years ago, we initiated as part of it, a discussion about more democratic forms of research in the field of social work, held in a gradually growing circle of representatives of academic networks from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Lithuania, and Poland.[1] The initial aim of CERTS and its

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[1] The relationship between the Department of Social Pedagogy represented by the Polish editors of this volume and the Centre dates back to 2000, when seminars set up by the CERTS started. Its focus has been the development of epistemological and methodological

seminars was to get to know different perspectives on analysis of broadly defined social work in member entities; however, at a certain stage of our search we reached fiercely disputed yet differently understood positions in each of the member states participatory methodologies.

Today, we can even say that they have allowed us to create an alternative methodological paradigm, but the beginnings did not go as far as this. Our original idea was to systematise social work research, taking into consideration the degree of "theoretical" and "physical" participation. The first aspect describes to what extent the researcher (academic) assumes the perspective of the research participant as an epistemological starting point for empirical conclusions. We extended this continuum from the scientist's normative perspective (negligible theoretical participation) to the understanding interpretive paradigm based on social constructivism. The other dimension of participation concerned the extent to which the researcher is physically present in the research participant's environment. Thus the defined continuum spreads from quantitative survey research (without any meeting between a researcher and a research "subject") to long-lasting participant observation. It seemed to us that such dimensions would form a matrix within which nearly all social research methods could be located, according to the level of service users' participation in them. At that time, it was difficult for us to imagine a possibility of co-creation of research by academics and service users, which is why we reduced the participation of the latter to the representation of their perspective (theoretical participation). In consequence, knowledge, even though it was not co-created, was produced with respect to the service users' perspective.[2]

The next stage of development involved adding the third dimension, meaning discursive participation. The adoption of the service users' perspective not only enriched the theoretical conclusions of particular studies, but also changed the scientific discourse in this area, which potentially might affect public debates over the issue indicated. In other words, we acknowledged the political representation of the users' point of view in academic and public discourses, and the methodological consequences this entailed (Granosik, 2014).

Despite some interesting examples of studies of our foreign colleagues, at this stage of collaboration we were unable to treat the participation of

aspects of social work. The seminars, always conducted in the two official languages of the Centre (French and English), were designed with the intention to create a platform for experience exchange as well as to consider the idea of building a possible partnership for future joint research projects. Over a long time of dynamic development of the activity of this Centre, its president was Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka, Chair of the Department of Social Pedagogy at the University of Łódź.

[2] This stage of work on participatory social work research was documented and discussed in a collective monograph (Marynowicz-Hetka, Gulczyńska, Granosik, 2011).

users as the fundamental methodological assumption. The real turning point in our thinking about participatory research came when the Polish editors of this volume encountered more radical forms of user participation, which are indicated by the process of empirically based co-creation of knowledge. What we mean by that are numerous experiences and publications by such authors as Peter Beresford (Brunel University, United Kingdom)[3], Katherine Tyson McCrea (Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work, USA) and Lewis Williams (University of Southern Queensland, Australia), all showing different variants of participatory research and practice including considerable participation or even control on the part of service users.

This made us realise how limited the idea of participation had been in our earlier conceptualisations. Moreover, thanks to these works, we discovered analogies between action research empowering service users and the Polish tradition of social pedagogy based on the revival of human strengths. Even though the original idea of Helena Radlińska – the creator of social pedagogy in Poland and the first Head of the Department of Social Pedagogy at the University of Łódź[4] – concerned action rather than research, the direction of changes seemed obvious: to include the interested parties in the activity that concerned them. In H. Radlińska's concept of social work, the notion of "social" "describes the goal of the action (for the community) and the methods used to undertake this action (through the strengths of the community)" (Lepalczyk, Marynowicz, 2001: 197). Social work was understood as "a conscious activity to reconstruct collective life based on eliciting, multiplying and improving human strengths, and organizing them to work for the good of people" (Radlińska, 1961: 305). Her social work's goal was "to analyse the conditions of a life to emancipate and elicit the creative potential of individuals, and not solely to adapt them to society" (Lepalczyk, Marynowicz, 2001: 197). The aim defined in such a way was to be achieved by the creation of a community: "Its structure is multi-dimensional, as it concurrently describes the goal of acting (for the community) and the manner of achieving the goal (using the strengths of the community)". In other words, in enhancing social change one cannot limit oneself to the social worker's activities "for the community" but also "by the community" (Lepalczyk, Marynowicz-Hetka, 2001), which clearly validates the idea of service users' participation.

The effect of this symbolic intercultural encounter was another joint monograph on participatory research in social work published in 2014 (Gulczyńska, Granosik, 2014). It was created thanks to, among other things, the involvement of the already listed researchers as well as our

[3] The Author of the chapter: *Radicalising Social Work: Involving Everyone; Including All Our Knowledges*; in this volume.

[4] It is Poland's first Department of Social Pedagogy which she organized between 1945 and 1950.

Lithuanian (Social Work Department at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania)[5] and our Polish colleagues (Department of Social Pedagogy, University of Łódź, Poland).[6] This time it was a publication in Polish, so it provided, to a greater extent, academics, practitioners, and potentially also service users with diverse international experiences concerning participatory social work action research, within this locality.

The idealised enthusiasm characterising our perception of participatory approaches at the time was more and more frequently accompanied by some critical thought, mostly inspired by the post-Foucauldian philosophy. One could not emphasise enough the inspiring role of Marek Czyżewski (Institute of Sociology, University of Łódź, Poland)[7] and his team, with whom, over nearly two years, we examined the issues of power in the research and activity of social pedagogues, and particularly to what extent they fit within the process of creating neoliberal subjectification through the educationalisation of social reality.[8]

In consequence, these meetings gave rise to our discussions of the contested, ambivalent and tension-laden nature of participatory research and the ways in which participatory methodologies may become tools for more subtle and hidden forms of governance. The political significance of participatory research that manifests itself in this perspective does not require any lengthy introductions. We even get the impression that participatory research is one of the most significant forms of social life democratisation in a knowledge society. It is also hard to ignore the shift in the function of universities resulting from such research: from knowledge creation to the creation of mechanisms for knowledge (society) democratisation.

The road leading to participatory research was in some ways different from, and also in some ways similar to, the perspective of Prof. Brian Littlechild, the other editor of this collection. In England and the wider UK, the very first ideas of taking into account service users' and carers' views, the precursor to greater service user participation, were presented in the

[5] Jonas Ruškus, Gedas Malinauskas, Natalija Mažeikienė from Social Work Department at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

[6] Three of them have also contributed to this publication: Małgorzata Kostrzyńska as the author and co-author of two parts: *Challenges Faced by Social Pedagogy Academics in the Course of Participatory Action Research with Homeless People and Street Workers as Co-Researchers* and *Participatory Response to Needs of People Who Experience Homelessness: the Example of "Homeful – Homeless" Box Project*; Anna Jarkiewicz the author of the chapter: *Theory and Practice of Participatory Approach in Schools: an Example of the Future Youth Schools – a Forums Project*, and Izabela Kamińska-Jatczak the author of the chapter: *Lines of Activity Addressed to Families: Limiting the Participatory Approach as with Casework Practitioners*.

[7] Marek Czyżewski is the author of the contribution *Pitfalls of Participatory Approaches*, in this volume.

[8] Some of results of this cooperation were published in the special issue of Societas/Communitas (2013).

research of Mayer and Timms in 1970 (Mayer, Timms, 1970). This book, and its approach/findings, had a major effect on Brian and his understanding of and motivations in my work – as it did on many other academics and practitioners. It laid the ground for much of what has happened since in social work in the UK.

The development of coproduction of services and individual care plans for service users and carers has been hailed as an important way forward in relation to diminishing the power imbalance between professionals and how they view how they should deliver services, and the views and experiences of service users and carers themselves. There is growing international recognition that areas of professional jurisdiction should be opened up to greater public scrutiny, debate and power-sharing (Plotnikov, 2016). This has been an important area of development in delivery of services in both health provision and in social work in England, particularly in work with people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, and children looked after in the public care. However, there have been criticisms from some service users that coproduction is just a way of getting service users and carers to take responsibilities for their own disadvantages and problems, and therefore attention needs to be paid to make it a reality that this is not the case in relation to challenging oppressive stereotypes, policies and interventions. In addition, some argue that this is based on the idea of individual rights, and therefore service users and carers being involved at this level, but not the highest policy and legislative levels in relation to societal views and actions. One of the main protagonists of service user power, Peter Beresford, is both an advocate for coproduction, but also a critic of some of the ways this is actioned in practice- or not- and how "lip service" can be paid to it but not really happening in everyday reality (Beresford, 2013, 2015). The importance of, and some examples of, recent developments, and reflections on these developments, in the area of coproduction and collaboration between professionals and service users and carers are set out in the chapters in this book written by Brian, and the Creating Links group, from the University of Hertfordshire.

Brian's personal interest in collaborative coproduction work in the areas of projects, teaching, policy-making and research came from his continuing dissatisfaction in ideas and paradigms in these areas that placed professionals and academics at the apex of a pyramid structure of how knowledge is seen to be constructed, operationalised, and given credence. The paradigm of allowing professionals and academics higher value in terms of their learning, views of the world, and ways of engaging with service users and carers which did not fully take account of the power imbalances within these relationships – did not seem to fit with the ideas of social work values in relation to human rights, participation, and social justice in relation to how problematic issues are framed, and responded to

in a way which fully takes account of these issues, and allow service users and carers the greatest amount of possibility to be empowered as equal partners in the construction and dissemination of knowledge. Consequently, over the last 15 years, Brian has been instrumental in developing the Creating Links group in its initial phases at the University of Hertfordshire, and has been involved in a number of research projects, taught modules and sessions which are co-produced. This interest has been fortunately one which has been shared with colleagues in the European Research Institute Social Work.

So, luckily for the further development of our thinking about participatory research, our paths crossed in the ERIS association with its seat at the Ostrava University (Czech Republic), which aims to intensify research activities in the field of social work based on partnership agreements[9] as part of cooperation between partner universities across Europe. Within this network, not only did we find space for discussions and planning participatory research projects, but also new contributors to this publication, who considerably broadened the socio-cultural context of the experiences presented. These contributors are Doris Böhler (University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, Austria)[10]; Davide Galesi (University of Trento, Italy)[11]; Alice Gojová and Kateřina Glumbíková (Ostrava University, Czech Republic)[12] and Hilaria Soundari (Gandhigram Rural Institute, Deemed University, India).[13]

Recognising the significance of tradition and the special interest in participatory practices at the Department of Social Pedagogy of the University of Łódź, ERIS gave us a mandate to organise the Participatory Social Work: Approaches, Barriers, Critique conference, which was held in Łódź on September 29–30, 2016. This was the event where we met

[9] The mission of the Institute is to carry out high-quality funded research projects involving the Institute's European partners, and to produce European-funded teaching and learning materials for social work and social care programmes. For this purpose, it brings together researchers in the field of social work from more than ten countries, who work on joint research projects and traditionally meet during the ERIS annual conference organised by different member academic centres and in the Spring School, which gathers PhD and MA students (from all over the world) for a few days each April at the Ostrava University in order to present, support and discuss research projects conducted by students and young researchers. The president of ERIS is Oldřich Chytil from the Ostrava University. For more look at: https://eris.osu.eu/.

[10] The author of the contribution: *Learning Together: Social Work Students and Service Users Reflect Critically on Their Diverse Life Experiences*, in this volume.

[11] The author of the contribution: *Ethnopsychological Consultation: a Tool for Strenghtenning of Partnerships in Multicultural Social Work*, in this volume.

[12] Authors of the contribution: *Dilemmas in Participatory Approaches to Social Work*, in this volume.

[13] The author of the contribution: *Contemporary Scenario of Participatory Social Work Research in Rural India*, in this volume.

and encouraged to write a chapter the following persons: Geof Dix, Di Bailey, Adam Barnard and Linda Kemp (Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom)[14], Sue Hollinrake, Sara Spencer (University of Suffolk, United Kingdom)[15], Katarzyna Czarnota (University of Adam Mickiewicz, Poland)[16], Witold Mandrysz (University of Silesia, Poland)[17], and Magdalena Sasin (University of Łódź, Poland).[18]

A wider spectrum of participatory practices was covered thanks to inviting some special guests. Contributions of Rita Bertozzi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy)[19]; Chiara Panciroli and Francesca Corradini (Catholic University of Milan, Department of Sociology, Italy)[20]; Eliška Černá and Lenka Polánková (Ostrava University, Czech Republic)[21]; Marek Mikulec and Kateřina Glumbíková (Ostrava University, Czech Republic)[22] and Participants of the Creating Links Group (University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom)[23] added new perspectives on participatory solutions to social issues and questions covered in our publication by other authors.

Presenting the story of how we reached the present stage, we are by no means suggesting that this is a universal evolutionary path of development. On the contrary, we believe that participation can be understood very differently, depending on the cultural context and institutional conditions, and so it can develop in various ways. Moreover, it would be really non-participatory to impose only one vision and development path on this approach.

The experience that we have jointly created teaches that publishing texts on participatory research is – from the academic point of view – very

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[14] Authors of the chapter: *Doing Participatory Action Research: Reflections on Criticality and Social Justice from the Researchers' Perspective*, in this volume.

[15] Authors of the chapter: *Co-producing Community with Disabled Researchers and citizens -the challenges and potential for successful collaboration*, in this volume.

[16] The author of the contribution: *Participatory Research with Romanian Roma Immigrants Living in Polish Settlements: Methodology, Results and Barriers*, in this volume.

[17] The author of the contribution: *Participatory Budgeting: Action Research Procedures in Community Work*, in this volume.

[18] The author of the contribution: *The Project of Artistic Workshops with Students: Achievements and Challenges of Participatory Practice in University Curriculum*, in this volume.

[19] The author of the contribution: *Empowering Migrant Youth through Participatory Approach in Social Work*, in this volume.

[20] Authors of the contribution: *Doing Participatory Research with Families that Live in Poverty: the Process, Potential and Limitations*, in this volume.

[21] Authors of the contribution: *Empowering Community: Theatre of the Oppressed as a Tool of Homeless People's Emancipation*, in this volume.

[22] Authors of the contribution: *Difficulties Faced by Researchers in Participatory Practices: An Example of Research with Roma People*, in this volume.

[23] Authors of the contribution: *"Creating Links": The Involvement of Service Users and Carers in the Provision of Social Work Education in England*, in this volume.

difficult. One has to accept diverse ways of presenting co-created knowledge, styles, and even text structures. We have decided that strict adherence to academic standards would be an effective barrier to knowledge co-creation, with some of its forms having no chance of getting published.

We hope that this publication represents different perspectives on participation in very diverse fields of social work. We wanted this publication to be positive regardless of how critical of themselves can representatives of different approaches be. Positive, however, does not mean naively idealising, which is why it also contains chapters that describe the risks and weaknesses of participatory research.

Have a nice read
Editors

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Part I

Changing Communities Through Participatory Practices

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GEOF DIX*, SUE HOLLINRAKE**, SARA SPENCER***

Co-producing Community with Disabled Researchers and Citizens: the Challenges and Potential for Successful Collaboration

Abstract

The chapter discusses the development of a collaborative research project, involving a service user-led Coalition of Disabled People, a local authority and a local university. The collaboration was set up to inform the Coalition's strategic planning and to raise awareness of disability issues locally, mapping assets and resources for/of disabled people, as well as needs and resource gaps. The initial pilot of this "listening project" is critiqued here. It adopted an inclusive approach to the differing roles and competences within the project co-ordinating team, whose members worked together to recruit and train disabled researchers and engage a small sample of participants. The project drew on ideas from emancipatory disability research to inform its approach. The discussion evaluates the benefits and challenges of a collaborative approach to data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings, to achieve meaningful change locally, critically reflecting on praxis and the project's effectiveness.

Introduction

This contribution will critique the development of a collaborative research project, involving a service user led Coalition of Disabled People, a local authority and local university within the eastern region

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** University of Suffolk, United Kingdom.
*** Customer Insight and Intelligence Manager, Adult and Community Services, Suffolk County Council, United Kingdom.

of England. The project was set up to inform the Coalition's strategic planning and to raise awareness of disability issues locally, mapping assets and resources for/of disabled people as well as needs and gaps. The following discussion will look critically at why and how the research developed as a collaborative project between the Coalition, the university and the local authority. It will critically explore some of the issues that arose as the project progressed and in particular will examine the tensions and benefits of recruiting and training local disabled people to conduct the research interviews, to be part of the process of analysing the data, incorporating their contribution as insider researchers and as "experts by experience". Findings from the research are considered along with the importance of acting on these to achieve the desired impact of promoting change.

Historical context of disability research

Historically, disability research has arisen out of a critique of mainstream research that was seen to serve the (mainly able-bodied) researchers more than the disabled people being researched (Oliver, 1992). Mike Oliver offered this critique within a wider discussion and theorising about the position of disabled people in Western society, in which a number of disabled scholars were debating the relative significance of impairment and disability, with some, for example disabled feminists such as Jenny Morris (1992), placing an emphasis on the personal experience of impairment, whilst others were exploring the sociological aspects of disablism (e.g. Oliver, 1996; Barnes, 1998). The interconnectedness of impairment and disability, and the effects of the one on the other within social, cultural and material contexts were also theorised (Thomas, 1999). Goodley (2017) provides a useful summary of the different strands within the development of disability theory. Disability research, like feminist research that draws on Feminist Standpoint Theory (Stanley, Wise, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 2002) has a particular "world view" which is that the central focus is on disabled people and their concerns, that research should be done with and not to them, and that the outcomes should be beneficial for disabled people. The aim is to capture their lived experience, listen to their stories and influence change, through a "lens" that sees the social construction of disabled people as oppressive. Again, there is a parallel with feminist research methodology, with its emphasis often on the subjective, using a qualitative approach that is flexible, to embrace the detail of peoples lives.

Research context and problem identified

The Suffolk Coalition of Disabled People (SCODP) was set up in 2013 as the first organisation of its kind in Suffolk – i.e. a service user-led organisation for people with a range of disabilities, as part of the growing development of organisations that were led by disabled people for disabled people based on the "nothing about us without us" slogan which refers to the influence that disability activism seeks over policy making (Charlton, 1998). As a newly established organisation, SCODP required a knowledge base from which to represent members and to lobby and campaign collectively for appropriate resources and services. Within this context, the research needed to be developed to ensure that it was co-productively executed, according to the top rung (citizen control) of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1971).

To this end, it required a research strategy to establish the numbers of disabled people within the county, to ascertain what resources existed already in Suffolk for disabled people and what the gaps were in terms of disabled people's needs and wishes to enable them to participate within their communities and to achieve dignity and well-being in their lives.

Conversations between representatives from the Coalition, the University of Suffolk and Suffolk County Council (SCC) Adult and Community Services produced a research plan that involved a three-pronged scoping exercise to:

- determine the numbers of disabled people across the county (from existing SCC statistics held by the Insight and Intelligence Team);
- provide an overview of existing resources through a telephone audit, using Coalition members to provide information about services they had used/were using, and;
- undertake an in-depth exploration using a qualitative approach (semi-structured interviews) to achieve a more detailed understanding of the experiences of disabled people within the county to ascertain what works and what does not work for them in their daily lives.

This initial reflective and early planning phase of the project took place in late 2014 and stage 2 of the project began with the telephone audit of services in the spring/summer of 2015, supported by social work students on placement at the Coalition who were supervised through the University. Funding was achieved to extend the project and research governance approval was obtained.

On examination of the data available for the rural county of Suffolk in the Eastern region of England, the following highlights were acknowledged.

Suffolk County has a total population of 741,895 (ONS 2015 mid-year population estimate) of which 18% are aged 0–15; 15% 16–29; 17% 30–45; 27% 45–64 and 22% 65+.

Table 1. Suffolk people aged 18–64 predicted to have a moderate or serious physical disability or common mental health disorder projected to 2018

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total population aged 18-64 predicted to have a moderate physical disability	34 609	34 641	34 786	34 923	35 056
Total population aged 18-64 predicted to have a serious physical disability	10 425	10 436	10 497	10 559	10 625
People aged 18-64 predicted to have a common mental disorder	68 423	68 359	68 359	68 352	68 307
Figures may not sum due to rounding. Crown copyright 2014					

Source: www.pansi.org.uk version 8.0 (accessed: 08.05.2107).

Table 2. Suffolk people aged 18–64 predicted to have a moderate or serious physical disability or common mental health disorder projected to 2030

	2014	2015	2020	2025	2030
Total population aged 18-64 predicted to have a moderate physical disability	34 609	34 641	35 310	35 579	34 890
Total population aged 18-64 predicted to have a serious physical disability	10 425	10 436	10 779	11 011	10 767
People aged 18-64 predicted to have a common mental disorder	68 423	68 359	68 196	68 026	67 398
Figures may not sum due to rounding. Crown copyright 2014					

Source: www.pansi.org.uk version 8.0 (accessed: 27.04.2017).

The research

There were a number of factors shaping the research approach, which was co-produced initially by the three organisations and this co-production continued when the expert researchers and co-researchers were recruited. Firstly, the social model of disability informs the work of Suffolk Coalition of Disabled People, which challenges structural exclusion, which led to the research being based on the social model as promoted by disability researchers such as Colin Barnes (1998) and Mike Oliver from a materialist perspective (1996) (see earlier).

In addition, the influence of developmental research (linked to Co-operative (person-centred) Inquiry (Heron, 1996)) and the standpoint theory from feminist research (Stanley, Wise, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 2002) was drawn on, in the sense that there should be transformative benefits for all involved in the research project. Emancipatory Disability Research, (arising out of the Disability Movement in the UK from the 1970s onwards), challenges the historical dominance of the medical model and academic research in Disability Studies, and states that, to challenge exclusion, research must be with disabled people as active participants and fellow researchers, based on the social model (a socio-political interpretation of disability and disability as social oppression).

A collaborative approach combining different kinds of knowledge and expertise was therefore required – pulling together the lived experience and knowledge of disability from disabled people themselves and the expertise of experienced researchers with their knowledge of project management, research theory and research experience. This would promote and enable collaborative learning for all involved. To this end, therefore, an emancipatory approach was developed (Goodley, 2017: 29). This approach to research problematises power and control within research relationships, aiming to equalise the research relationship, hence the significance of expert researchers and expert participants (co-researchers). As stipulated by Michael Turner and Peter Beresford (2005), the research project was initiated by the Suffolk coalition – i.e. by disabled people themselves, and was underpinned by a set of values that included 'empowerment, emancipation, participation, equality (and) anti-discrimination' which continued throughout the research process (Turner, Beresford, 2005: 27). This meant that for this stage of the project, disabled people would be recruited as expert researchers and participants as co-researchers, each drawing on their experiences as disabled people and as "insiders" (Robson, McCartan, 2016: 399) with lived experience of and expertise in the problems identified for exploration. It was also important that all were involved in the analysis and dissemination of the findings.

Key characteristics of this approach, according to Colin Barnes (2003) are:

- accountability to organisations controlled and run by disabled people (SCODP);
- a commitment to the social model of disability;
- the choice of methodology and methods tend to be qualitative;
- meaningful practical outcomes for disabled people.

The project was developed with all these factors in mind.

Project aims and objectives

The aim was to develop a clear understanding of the demand for current and future disability services across the county of Suffolk, building on an initial audit of existing services conducted by SCODP in 2015. The objectives were:

- for disabled people in Suffolk to identify the issues most pressing for disabled people – what works and what does not work in their lives;
- to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be a disabled person living in Suffolk, through engaging disabled researchers who have "insider" knowledge;
- to support and train Expert Researchers who are disabled or are affected by long-term health conditions to undertake the research with their greater understanding of disability issues.

Project planning

As SCC's Adult and Community Services already held quantitative information on the support they provide in the community to current customers, this third phase of the project entitled the Expert Researchers Project, aimed to undertake qualitative interviews across the county to capture the real experience of living in Suffolk with a disability. A pilot project would initially be in Ipswich. The Project Co-ordinating Team comprising a representative from each of the three organisations – Suffolk County Council, the Suffolk Coalition of Disabled People and the University of Suffolk, held regular meetings to plan the stages of the research, put together a research governance application, recruit (job description, advertising and selection process) and train (5 training sessions on qualitative interviewing) expert researchers, organise the selection of the participants (co-researchers), track funding applications and monitor spending, set up the interviews, and arrange the data analysis sessions (carried out together by the expert researchers with the project team). This was all done to achieve the following outcomes:

- that the voices of disabled people can be heard and have influence;
- that future Health and Social Care services commissioned can more accurately reflect the needs of people and carers in Suffolk communities;
- that services that are timely and effective will target demand more accurately with the possibility of reducing costs in the future.

Methodology

When considering the methodology, the quantitative information already available was examined, and the need for more qualitative data from customers living in local communities who were using services and accessing a range of resources and facilities was identified, as stated above. The co-produced methodology for stage 3 therefore sought to undertake qualitative interviews via expert researchers with co-researchers capturing the real experience of living in Ipswich (initial pilot) with a disability. It was additionally decided to equip co-researchers with a disposable camera to record their experiences. These images were used to inform the qualitative, semi-structured interviews.

This approach has connections with an approach to using photographs within qualitative interviews, which has been termed a “photo elicitation method” (Harper, 2002). Douglas Harper (2002: 20) describes this method mainly from the point of view of researchers presenting participants with photographs, in which “photo elicitation may overcome the difficulties posed by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties”.

He also discusses a study in which the method is used with participants who self-interview. He also highlights the collaborative aspect of this approach, which is of significance for this project “When two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together” (Harper, 2002: 23).

Recruitment and training

Researchers and co-researchers were recruited using SCODP’s networks and local media. Researchers and co-researchers self-selected. For this pilot phase we were not able to include people with a range of disabilities as numbers were small (5 researchers and 10 co-researchers). Initial contact was through a named representative of SCODP, who was available to answer questions and discuss any finer points of the co-produced job descriptions. This initial contact was also an opportunity to reassure potential expert researchers and co-researchers that the recruitment and training sessions would be held in accessible spaces and any barriers to attendance would be removed. A fun and relaxed recruitment day was held to assess the skills of the potential expert researchers in relationship-building and empathy. This time together was also an opportunity to develop the five training sessions around using the shared knowledge of the expert researchers.

Data collection

An integral part of the weekly training sessions was the shared learning and development of everyone involved in the project. Feedback was given to the trainers via a weekly blog with each expert researcher in turn writing a blog to summarise the training session. These blogs were helpful reminders of the knowledge shared and an effective tool when absence from a training session was unavoidable. The final two training sessions were used to develop and practice the research questions in preparation for the interviews. Finally, a session was held to introduce expert researchers to the co-researchers they would interview and to distribute disposable cameras for the co-researchers to record images of their daily experiences. These photographs (taken where necessary with permission) of situations and occurrences that either worked well or did not work at all for them, acted as the catalyst for the interviews. The pictures supported the transcripts recorded by the Co-researchers and were later displayed for public viewing and comment (see Dissemination below).

Interviews and thematic analysis

Time was taken with both the expert researchers and co-researchers directly after each interview session, coming together to discuss and share experiences. As these quotes demonstrate the feedback was positive:

> Feeling nervous but once past the introductions the nerves went.
> Enjoyable – I had a lot of laughs…
> It was the best day of my life
> The photos helped to get the conversation going.

All the interviews were recorded, and once transcribed, analysis days were arranged with the expert researchers to identify initial codes and themes jointly as a group. The group discussed the initial coding, sharing their experiences, with many of their stories overlapping with those identified from the co-researcher transcripts. Working together the group seemed to naturally develop a collective response to the emerging issues and a shared set of values emanating from a social model perspective (Oliver, 2009), characterised the way the data was interpreted.

During these reflective discussions, larger themes were identified and presented to both the expert researchers and co-researchers to reality-check the findings.

The following themes were identified as areas for discussion, and most of these themes were identified by more than one co-researcher, emerging as common themes, revealing problems for disabled people in the following areas, as listed below:

- Built Environment – eg. uneven pavements for visually impaired people and wheelchair users;
- Transport – having to wait to access a bus with space for a wheelchair – especially when parents with prams/buggies are also competing for the space. Having to plan a train journey with advanced notice to stations for the use of ramps for wheelchair access;
- Accessibility – Shops – e.g. steps in shops in Ipswich town centre which prevent wheelchair users from accessing all areas of the shop, or display materials that block aisles, or outside pavements and prevent or limit access;
- Housing/Homes – the difficulties of obtaining timely assessments and the work being scheduled. The work can take up to a year for the recommended adaptations to be completed. As councils prioritise rent over suitability;
- Car Parks – e.g. lift not operating on Sundays in one car park which bars wheelchair users on that day;
- Pathways in public open spaces - e.g. some have steps which prevent wheelchair users from accessing the paths;
- Services – Care packages not being tailored to the person and care being offered at times more convenient to the care provider rather than the customer. Wheelchair users not having the same experience as non- disabled people – i.e. cinema;
- Attitudes – cars parked on the pavement which cause wheelchair users to move into the road with risk to themselves and other road users;
- Toilets – insufficient disabled toilets in public spaces;
- Personal Care/Relationships - Difficulty in obtaining the correct type of care and trust in person/company obtaining care package from. Selection of carers limited and process complicated. Being limited in how we take care of ourselves, correct equipment and facilities to allow personal care especially in public places. Relationships with public and perceptions of what disabled people look for in a relationship i.e. other disabled people or no relationship at all;
- Social Exclusion – Being excluded from major events due to lack of space for disabled or facilities not suitable. Perception of disabled people not wanting to voice opinions therefore being excluded from given choice;
- Education – Choice of subjects and facilities, if the venue is not accessible. What's on offer to disabled people and special requirements through the course, is there enough special education for non-disabled to understand the complex needs for disabled people wanting further education. Need for more disabled teachers to be trained and encouraged to teach;

- Risk – Vulnerability when out alone, risk of falls and lack of public help. Risk of being "scammed" due to lack of education regarding these issues and confidence to stand up for themselves;
- Sports – Choice of sports for disabled people, transport, especially if rural, costs including transport, changing facilities not being adequate, trained staff to teach the sports to the disabled. More sports are coming up for disabled people but time, cost, special training and facilities stop people from attending. Promotion of sports for disabled people not nationwide or local to various areas.

These initial themes were grouped together to form more general themes, which included:

- Built environment and accessibility;
- Transport;
- Attitudes (to self and of others);
- Social Exclusion;
- Financial issues;
- Technology;
- Work;
- Personal care/relationships;
- Risk;
- Frustrated independence;
- What works and why?

Together we developed some overarching themes which linked across those listed above. These highlighted the experiences of disabled people across all areas of life and in their engagement with others, and serve to indicate how physical barriers and negative experiences (e.g. attitudes of others) can have an impact on mental health and well-being. These were:

- Quality of life/well-being;
- Wanting the same experience as everyone else;
- The additional demands on a disabled person's energy to confront barriers;
- The undermining of dignity;
- The lack of spontaneity in aspects of disabled people's lives.

Research in action – the challenges

As discussed earlier, the commitment to social justice as an outcome for the research project meant that methodologically, we were working within the emancipatory research paradigm. As Mary Swigonski (1994: 390) stated in relation to feminist research, insider researchers have "a knowledge of,

awareness of, and sensitivity to both the dominant worldview of society and their own perspective".

This is the basis of the expertise that "experts by experience" bring to the research process, and in conjunction with the participants are thereby able to make visible the issues under investigation, which in everyday life are barely in view for the majority who structurally occupy a different position. Discussions with our expert researchers prior to conducting the interviews highlighted that they felt that self-disclosure within the research interviews was inevitable due to the likely similarity of experiences of physical and attitudinal barriers within everyday experiences of disabling environments, as well as positive experiences. This made explicit their "standpoint". In conventional research, this kind of social process for generating the data would be seen as "contamination", as it moves away from the notion of the scientifically neutral and objective "outsider" researcher, studying subjects external to her/himself. This blurring of boundaries between researcher and researched in collaborative research can raise issues about the validity of the research, but this is countered by arguments that suggest that positivist research itself cannot be bias-free (Crotty, 1998), that critical social research is "an essentially political activity rather than a neutral fact-finding mission" (Beresford, 2002: 99), and that the less distance there is between the experience and its interpretation, then the more accurate it is likely to be (Beresford, 2003).

Shulamit Reinharz (1995) highlights benefits from this research approach, when she refers to the passion and commitment that arises in human research when subjectivity lends itself to the establishment of empathy through emotional connection and inter-subjectivity. In our research, the sharing of concrete experiences, supported by the use of photographs of these experiences, formed a firm basis for the interviews and data collection. One of the researchers commented during a reflective session after an interview day that she "had a lot of laughs". Expanding on this in the group discussion, it was clear that some of the laughs were a way of dealing with issues that were serious or sad around shared experiences of oppression. This illustrated the "insider" identification that can promote trust and security within the research relationship, reducing the need for "impression management" and the fear of being judged on what one shares, so that the participant feels able to speak and share openly and honestly.

However, as Heather D'Cruz and Martyn Jones (2014: 110) comment, there is a "shifting combination" between insider and outsider identities, and a combination of both can occur along a continuum. In relation to this research project, the "insider" researcher, through participation in reflective discussions, had to stand back and take a more outsider position to think critically about "taken for granted" realities and positions to avoid the danger within this approach, of what Kate van Heugten (2004: 207) refers to as

the “spectre of insider bias”. Discussing “nearness” as an issue between researcher and participant, Jones (2004) warns of the dangers of what she terms “peerness” – i.e. the problems of similarity of experience for peer researchers when there can be difficulty separating participants’ responses about their experiences, from their own, as researchers. To recognise and be vigilant about this possibility, there was a need for constant examination and challenging of existing knowledge and beliefs to ensure an openness to new knowledge, rather than overlooking it due to being close to the lived experience. This openness was important in this research project, because insider positioning and expertise can not only cause the unquestioning acceptance of information as taken-for-granted, but can also underplay its significance, as much as outsider positioning can fail to explore and acknowledge important issues because of a lack of detailed knowledge and experience.

An added dimension to this is that the expert researchers and the participants or co-researchers could not claim representativeness within their communities. Whilst both groups were what Hugh McLaughlin (2010: 1594) terms “direct” service users’ – i.e. at the time of the research, using the services and managing their lives in the area under investigation, and they were physically disabled as wheelchair users or with a sensory impairment, or with a mental health diagnosis (past or present), there was no guarantee that their experiences were going to completely overlap with those of the wider community. Both groups were self-selecting, because they were motivated to be actively involved in a process of change, but due to the small-scale nature of the research, there was a narrowness in the types of disability covered in the experiences explored.

The benefits of the co-productive approach were in particular the experiences of working in collaboration as a group, immersed in the activity, sharing different perspectives and finding common ground. The group culture that developed, created an openness to new information and knowledge and the sharing of feelings and experiences.

The following feedback has been received from the Expert Researchers:

> For me, it felt that the project was beneficial, it showed what was missing in terms of access in Ipswich for people with a range of disabilities. The research carried out by the participants has enabled people to understand the struggles that are faced daily and how these are overcome. I truly enjoyed working on the project as it gave me the opportunity to take a peek inside the lives of other disabled people. Being a wheelchair user myself, I had the chance to see how they coped with certain issues and then related it to my life in a way, how could i improve things? However, I have not seen many changes throughout my local area and town, parking on pavements, overgrown hedges and so on but it just means we need to fight more for the simple things in life.
>
> It was good to meet other disabled people and hear the difficulties they encounter both with similar problems and with different difficulties.

> The whole exercise made me feel validated, like it was okay to point things out because it wasn't just me that was affected and i wasn't just a moaning Minnie!
>
> I would say that being part of the project gave me confidence in going out of the house again. It made me feel part of the community and it gave me a voice.

Dissemination

So far dissemination has taken several forms. Firstly we organised a series of exhibitions. The initial dissemination event was a half-day exhibition held at the University in Ipswich in order to publicise the findings from this "pilot" phase of the project, which draws on the experiences of disabled people living in the Ipswich area. The photos taken by the co-researchers prior to their interviews were used as a display to highlight both positive and negative experiences – though the emphasis was much more towards the barriers that the co-researchers reported as a significant part of their experiences in going about their daily lives. The photos were organised into the themes identified in the data analysis. A podcast was produced for this exhibition by the project team and the expert researchers, to provide a means of sharing the information about the project with those who are visually impaired.

The exhibition was situated in the ground floor foyer of the University, which allowed people passing through – students, university staff, the general public as well as invited guests to view the photo exhibits. This was done to reach as wide an audience as possible and to raise people's awareness of the issues for disabled people. The same exhibition was also taken to a local library and to the local authority headquarters, supported by a report for the local authority and for the Coalition.

Impact and potential

Findings from this small-scale pilot research project undertaken with disabled people living in the pilot area of Ipswich, Suffolk have been well publicised and received. Now the project intends to extend out across the rest of the county, to maintain the momentum and maximise the benefit of involving trained expert researchers.

It is acknowledged that the majority of the current expert researchers and co-researcher cohort represent the physically disabled community. To address this future recruitment of researchers and participants will include a wider range of disabilities, but if this is not possible, we will engage with relevant local societies and organisations to supplement research findings

to ensure the widest range of voices can be heard. However, it is clear that despite the existence of disability legislation, access to amenities and facilities such as shops, transport etc. that enable people to participate in everyday life, remains patchy at best and are still problematic for disabled people. Specific examples have been highlighted throughout this publication, suggesting that progress to comply with disability legislation is slow. To address this issue SCODP have actively engaged with architects, planners and providers of services in Suffolk at the design stage to ensure future developments meet the requirements of all citizens. e.g. SCODP's involvement in The Hold (a public records office) Thetford Forest Visitor Centre and with EDF (an electricity supply company) at Sizewell electricity power plant.

It would be beneficial to investigate the work done in Chester, which has very recently won the European Access City Award for 2017. Forty-three cities across twenty-one EU countries entered for the award. Chester has recognised the importance of improving access for disabled people across its tourist sites and retail, leisure and hospitality amenities, and supporting infrastructure such as accessible toilets, tactile paving, taxi and bus accessibility and the use of accessibility angels, who support individuals accessing the city centre on a one-to-one basis. The city council has endeavoured to design in disability access from the beginning with new developments and make improvements to old ones – e.g. spending £0.5 m per year since 2009 to make most of the city wall accessible to disabled people. There is an access group working within the council, which engages with disabled people to learn about barriers and it is not only the public sector, but also Chester's private enterprises are involved in accessibility initiatives.

> The European Jury particularly appreciated the facilities and measures targeting the most severely disabled visitors. Chester stands out not only for its impressive steps undertaken so far, but also for its long-term approach and ambitious plans for the future (European Commission, 2017).

Conclusion

Many of the findings from this collaborative research project resonate with a publication from the Equality and Human Rights Commission entitled, *Being Disabled in Britain: a Journey less Equal* – a review of disability inequality in Britain, in a report which concentrates on quantitative data, though several of the themes examined corroborate the findings of the qualitative pilot research project undertaken with disabled people living in Ipswich, Suffolk, with depressing conclusions in the face of the existence of disability legislation in the UK created to eradicate and prevent

this inequality. Lending weight to the findings from the research conducted in Ipswich, the Equality and Human Rights Commission Report powerfully states that:

> It is a badge of shame on our society that millions of disabled people in Britain are still not being treated as equal citizens and continue to be denied the everyday rights non-disabled people take for granted, such as being able to access transport, appropriate health services and housing, or benefit from education and employment (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017: 7).

However, not all our research focused on the negative aspects of living with a disability in Suffolk. The findings revealed that there are pockets of experience where physical impairment has been thought about when providing services or physical amenities and resources in the community. Positively, the impact of the dissemination of the research findings has produced a greater involvement of the Coalition in planning for community resources in the local area, with the "expert researchers" acting as consultants for new planning initiatives, which suggests that those with the means to effect change have taken note of the serious impact that discrimination has on individuals in the community with specific needs.

The increase in confidence gained by the expert researchers and their increased visibility has been a significant "additional benefit" in several ways. Some researchers have decided to apply for jobs and have used their research experience on their application forms. The group "identity" which emerged from the research strengthened everyone, in that all those immersed in the research had a greater awareness of the world around them and began to identify with not just personal issues but with a sense of a common identity and purpose, and the power of the group to demand change. Co-construction for social change in partnership with the researchers/services users should not be just about the research itself, but, as identified earlier, about the outcomes that are created as a result of it. There is a direct relationship with the methodology – when you actively share power, the benefits of this way of working flow from it.

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Participatory Budgeting: Action Research Procedures in Community Work

Abstract

Implementation of actions based on consensus and social dialogue builds a proper climate for cooperation among all social forces in order to solve a given problem or achieve a definite goal, also at local community level (Cohen, 1978; Ross, 1967).

One of the manifestations of the practical implementation of the concept of participatory democracy and civil dialogue at the local community level, are actions within assumptions of participatory budgeting which may be defined as a form of "collective" decision-making process, within the framework of which, the inhabitants along with the local authorities co-create the city budget (Ganuza, Baiocchi, 2012; Górski 2007).

A specific method that enables the checking of the level of willingness of members of a community to undertake common project actions is a participating intervention research. Planning extensive and costly environmental projects such as revitalization projects, should be preceded with implementation of a participatory budget according to methodology of participating intervention research.

Introduction

Community work is defined as a process in which the community specifies its needs or goals, establishes its hierarchy, and deploys its inherent resources that would meet these needs and objectives, and by appropriate action sets out to expand and improve attitudes and practices of cooperation and collaboration in that community (Cohen, 1978; Ross,

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1967; Rothman, Tropman, 1987; Haynes, Holmes, 1994; Wódz, Kowalczyk, 2014). Due to the high degree of complexity of these types of projects and the need to mobilize large forces and resources, we may assume that the level of engagement of community members towards activities within a particular project usually determines its effectiveness. Local Community Organization should involve the citizens in joint activities to change the unfavourable state of affairs from the outset of the project planning until its final evaluation. Participation of the citizens in actions undertaken, whether financial or decision-making, whether associated with contribution in labour or of social issues, encourages the activation of citizens, thus building a sense of belonging and responsibility for the implementation and results of the project. It seems to be reasonable to examine the potential engagement of community members before the implementation of it.

The challenges of community work in excluded communities

In most cases, the activities connected with the Organization of a Local Community are taken in the communities that would be called multi-problem, especially if an initiator and main executor of such activities is local authorities or institutions subordinate to them. The development of such activities was observed in recent years in various Operational Programmes defining the rules of expending funds from the European Social Fund at the central or regional level. In most cases, these programmes were dedicated to groups and environments being at risk of social exclusion or excluded. In Weil's typology (2005), we can find a model of Community social and economic development, which refers to a group of people in a particular locality being characterised by a form of social or economic discrimination. The undertaken actions encourage poor and marginalised communities to take social and economic initiatives, which constitute the basis for economic development of these groups of people and at the same time lead to the improvement of economic or social conditions of their inhabitants (Weil, 2005). In such models of community work, particular emphasis is put on understanding of local conditions affecting the social relations, and the relation of the residents to the local authority and its activities (see: Mandrysz, Perlinski, Evertsson, 2017).

As it was mentioned before, the level of effectiveness of such activities depends mainly on the involvement of inhabitants – their belief that the given project may satisfy (at least to some extent) their individual needs and that it is good for the community. The second element is the way that the role of inhabitants was defined at the stage of planning the project actions. Are they

active entities or passive consumers/beneficiaries of taken actions? It may be assumed that it depends on the way of comprehension of Organization of Local Community, but also on actual relationships and social divisions resulting from the position of particular groups and communities making up the social structure of a given city/locality. At the local level, informal relationships and connections between specific groups will be of basic importance, within which cooperation, exercising power or having impact on authorities and decisions, will guarantee the maintenance of a specific system. Therefore, these groups will be more privileged than groups that don't have such options.

Local communities forming enclaves of poverty usually don't have too much impact on political decisions at the level of cities/towns. The inhabitants of these communities usually are not involved in local political life, including participation in local elections. Therefore, they have limited impact on making decisions and they are not a potential electorate for the governments. These environments, from the perspective of local government budgets, belong to a category of costs due to social welfare provided to their inhabitants or unprofitable housing resources. "Investments" in these areas and their inhabitants are often perceived as a "waste of public money".

The inhabitants of these areas very often verbalize directly their dislike for local authorities, blaming them for lack of investment and renovation negligence for these areas, for the creation of a "ghetto", where, due to rent debts, "the worst element" is exiled (the inhabitants who remember better times of their districts usually mention this). There are also people who were "exiled" and who are not able or do not want to integrate with new environment, blaming both authorities and social services for their bad situation. Such tensions and more or less open conflicts constitute the social background and context of political decisions, distribution of goods and the whole government process. It may be assumed that there is domination and hegemony of local authority attention to interest groups, located in "better" districts, wealthier or at least less "costly" ones; with local government supporting and getting support from these groups and formal and informal relationships resulting from it, and positions communities of enclaves of poverty in a specific way and consolidates their economic, political and social exclusion (see: Mandrysz, Perlinski, Evertsson, 2017: 179–181).

As it was stated by Mayo:

> community workers need to have knowledge and understanding of the socio-economic and political backgrounds of the areas in which they work, including knowledge and understanding of political structures and relevant organizations and resources in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. And they need to have knowledge and understanding of equal opportunities policies and practice, so they can apply these effectively in every aspect of their work (Mayo, 1994: 74).

Action research – specific participatory research and activating procedure

As it was mentioned before, extensive projects, that is, the activities related to Organization of a Local Community, require the potential of involvement of inhabitants of a given community. The development of a project, preceded with in-depth analysis, taking preparatory actions, etc. are both time-consuming and expensive. Therefore, looking for the ways of optimization of chances of their realization seems to be legitimate. It requires not only the acquisition of good knowledge about capabilities and resources of the relevant institutions, which will be responsible for their realization, but also to determine the willingness of inhabitants to become involved in such actions. Therefore, before realization of complicated, long-term and expensive projects, taking actions that require a lower amount of effort and means seems to be rational, which will enable both instigators of a project-institutions and organizations involved in them-and members of the community, to check the potential of all these partners to cooperate.

A specific method to check the level of willingness of members of community to undertake common project actions is a research procedure, which is connected with making changes. In the subject literature, this type of research is called action research – research through actions, or participatory intervention research. On the one hand, it is a more or less specified research procedure, and on the other hand, is a broad research orientation that consists of many procedures of both quantitative and qualitative character. However, the basic assumption is that action research/ intervention research is connected with examination of real and not abstract practices. It assumes learning about real, specified practices concerning specific people in specific places (see: Kemmis, McTaggart, 2014).

The key feature of this process is its cyclical, spiral, recurring character: (planning – action and observation – reflection – change/adaptation – action and observation – reflection – change/adaptation – action ….). Such procedure assumes that we should act in accordance with a previously defined plan; however, it is constantly monitored and considered whether the effect of the actions was in accordance with the plans, and if they are not, how changes are introduced to the next cycle of actions, which is monitored, etc.

The main assumption of this theoretical approach suggests that in these actions, the researchers and inhabitants should have equal roles of cooperating researchers, who develop a common plan for the research process, then execute it, constantly controlling (evaluating) its course and obtained results, share their experiences and reflections, and analyse and mutually assess their vision of desired changes and propositions of

solutions (see: Wyka, 1985 follow: Wódz, 1998: 156). Of course this kind of assumption seems to be very idealistic especially if we compare the social status, resources, knowledge etc. of these two parties. However, to achieve the best possible results, the researcher, who is in a privileged position in this relation, should try to create circumstances as close to this assumption as it is possible.

Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2014) distinguished 7 characteristics of intervention research. With reference to Organization of Local Community, they may be presented in the following way:

– It is a social process that helps people to understand, both in the individual and social spheres, how they are shaped in the course of socialization and changed as a result of social influences and how they can improve these factors and relationships.
  A team of members of communities, local institutions and organizations taking part in participatory intervention research may define shared values and norms, traditions of the members of community, dominant socialization mechanisms, etc. Action research shows the impact of the above-mentioned elements on mutual relationships of the members of community and their potential to cooperate, which may be used in future projects.
– Full participation of a group of people involved in it is assumed and they, as researchers and subjects analyse their (individual and collective) knowledge – the ways of comprehension of skills and values or interpretative categories. It allows them to understand how their own knowledge forms their sense of identity and subjectivity, as well as limitations resulting from it.
  The members of the community examine the environment of their life and themselves. On the one hand, it allows them to better and more quickly identify the ways of comprehension and interpretation of some issues by a given community, on the other hand, it allows the uncovering of unconscious social processes arising from shared convictions, which constitute a barrier or basis for limitations in actions.
– This type of research is practical and based on cooperation. Involving people in the process of verification of social practices and processes of social interactions enables the understanding of communication practices and other social practices experienced by them, which may help to discover how to improve and reconstruct their situations together.
  A particular value of this approach for Organization of Local Community is that activities undertaken are of a practical character, therefore, research may be conducted with reference to analogous methodologies as in the projects, which will be carried out in

these communities. It allows the research to verify the potential of community to cooperate for common good and cooperation in future projects with different partners based on proven actions. Such actions enable not only the examination of the level of social capital in a given community, but also allow to build such capital (see: Putnam, 2001).

– Participatory intervention research is of an emancipatory character, that is, it can help people to free themselves from irrational, unproductive, unfair and unsatisfactory social structures. Removing social limitations makes them more conscious and responsible for their actions.

  The projects connected with Organization of Local Community require active participation of local leaders, who are aware of the meaning of the project and dominant role of community in the course of its execution. A community that is aware of its resources, free from disempowering complexes and ready to struggle for realization of their needs, increases its changes to achieve assumptions of a project.
– Participatory intervention research is critical towards examining existing conditions in the sphere of language, social and political relations. This assumption allows the participants of the research to look more critically at the role of social and political discourse, economic and professional status, and structure of authorities on the determination of their social practices.

  Participatory intervention research, can increase aspirations for independence and a sense of responsibility for inhabitants' own life, creating new circumstances concerning "location of authority and control" in local social and political structures. In addition, it demands an increase in the level of openness of remaining players to maintain partnership relations.
– It is a reflective research procedure, based on recognizing reality in order to change it, with particular emphasis on the process and conditions of making this change. This process is based on a spiral of critical and self-critical activities oriented towards making changes and reflection on the way such conditions are made. It means that the goal is not only to make changes, but also to develop in-depth understanding of the way they are created, the meaning of all the relevant circumstances, and the role of all people involved in the process of making changes, including the research group.

  This feature of participatory intervention research is of basic importance for proper comprehension by the inhabitants, representatives of institutions and organizations of how practical realization of actions within the scope of Organization of Local

Community may look like in their environment. Based on conducted participatory intervention research and observation during action research, participants will develop skills and knowledge to know what to pay attention to, what to avoid and how to optimize projects in the future.

– Participatory intervention research aims at transformation of both theory and practice. However, the dominant role is not ascribed either to theory nor practice. It is more focused on perceiving and presenting these areas.

  Organization of Local Community is based on a rich theoretical basis, indicating various typologies and models concerning this approach, each with their specific methodology. Action Research is a research procedure that encourages and mobilizes verification of theories. It forces people directly involved in such procedures to critically refer to theoretical models, looking for the most appropriate ones to the environmental conditions (Kemmis, McTaggart, 2014: 785–787).

The main and final goal of activities undertaken within participatory intervention research is to improve the functioning of the local community. On the one hand, such improvement may be achieved as a result of properly conducted research, which will provide knowledge about communities, processes that occur within them, and effectiveness of actions undertaken. On the other hand, such improvement will result from internalization and propagation of the experiences of cooperation, self-awareness and ability to reflectively comprehend the process of making changes, which were gained by the members of community with representatives of institutions and organizations cooperating within research team while carrying out the procedures of intervention research (Niesporek, 2013: 82).

In Polish conditions, initiators and implementers of local community organizing projects are usually local government institutions, along with the associated social assistance services. This is mainly due to the necessity of mobilization of considerable financial resources in areas under jurisdiction of local authorities. In this context this organisation can be understood as a Social Development (Payne, 2005: 217–223).

I am personally convinced about the necessity of deeper engagement of members of the community with actions which are called Organizing of Local Community. But this engagement will not be possible without greater openness of all “partners”/participants of these kinds of actions. This partnership relation may be built only if representatives of funding institutions, local authorities etc. will eschew their privileged, leading position to create the space for sharing experiences and knowledge taken through joint actions. It may create the circumstances in which community members will be more convinced to take partnership positions.

Participatory budgetting – an opportunity for implementation of action research procedure

In recent years, we have been witnessing in Poland the dynamic career of one of the forms of deliberative democracy, which is known as civic/ participatory budgeting. The practical application of participatory budgeting procedures was first used in Brazilian Porto Alegre in 1989, from where it spread quite quickly not only in Brazil and South America but also in other regions of the world, including Western and Southern Europe.

There is a lack of a clear and generally accepted definition of participatory budgeting. It is defined mainly upon the socio-cultural conditions and legal and political circumstances of a given society. Therefore, similar actions in different societies can be defined differently. However, participatory budgeting can be defined as a form of "collective" decision-making process, allowing inhabitants along with the local authorities to create the town budget (usually in relation to its constituent parts – the districts, neighbourhoods, street quarters, objectives or tasks), and at the same time, making decisions on the distribution of a specified pool of public funds. Basically, participatory budgeting allows citizens (and sometimes the users of a particular space – e.g. commuters), despite the fact that they were not elected to local decision-making bodies, to participate in creation of concepts and/or the allocation of public funds (Sintomer et al., 2012; Ganuza, Baiocchi, 2012; Górski, 2007). It has a specific dimension in the case of the enclaves of poverty where the level of bonding social capital (see: Putnam, 1995, 2001) is low, and which results in a low level of shared trust. It usually brings a limited degree of commitment of inhabitants to work together to achieve common goals or resolve societal problems.

The basic element of participatory budgeting is a public discussion of inhabitants who meet at the meetings or forums. Active and real dialogue between inhabitants is a basis for their inclusion in the whole project and cooperation with other players. The central point of this public discussion is – how to use precisely defined and limited financial resources?

Participatory budgeting is not limited to the level of district, neighbourhood or institution, even though when it comes to the dimension of specific projects, the micro level seems to be more rational and practical to implement – at least one of the stages of participatory budgeting should also concern the whole city. The projects conducted at the local level, removed from the perspective of a whole city, can be easily dominated by interests of individual social groups or political options. They are seldom successful in establishing and satisfying common needs of inhabitants and formulating reasonable proposals, instead of focusing on general demands or protests.

The outcomes developed in participatory budgets are binding, which leads to actual implementation of the proposals selected by the inhabitants. The residents receive feedback both on projects selected during the discussion, and those that were rejected. Implementation of specific actions arising from a participatory budget is monitored, and information resulting from the monitoring is made available to the inhabitants.

Participatory budgeting should be implemented as a long-term, long-standing process repeated every year, since it is not one-off action. This assumption allows for a kind of institutionalisation of participatory budgeting as a kind of procedure or algorithm for operationalisation – through its repetition, it is smoother and becomes more efficient; the inhabitants, seeing positive effects and being given feedback, get involved in it more eagerly, and being treated as equals, have greater confidence, and engage more actively in implementation of particular projects (see: Sintomer et al., 2012; Kłębowski, 2013).

An issue that arouses debate and worth analyzing is the extent to which implemented actions in Polish municipalities are convergent with the idea, values and theoretical assumptions of the participatory budget. Critics of this type of activities draw attention to a number of restrictions and sometimes distortions of implemented civic budgets.

It is argued that they are attended by a limited (unrepresentative) number of people/residents, or that they have a “club” character, because they are limited to “activating” those already activated, forming a team of “friends” which cooperates better without including additional people. It is also suggested that in Polish conditions these activities are mainly building political capital of local authorities, which are not so much interested in stimulating civic participation, but in building a political public relations based on the slogans of the civic budget.

Despite the criticism, there are many examples of interesting implementation of the civic budget, such as in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Wrocław, Sopot and many other cities. From the point of view of this contribution, the pioneering project 2-poles – different ends of the city, different citizens implemented by the Centre for Development of Social Initiatives from Rybnik in 2009–2010 seems to be particularly interesting. In this project, participatory budgeting procedures were implemented based on funds obtained for this purpose from the Fund for Non-Governmental Organizations, that was not related to the budget of the city of Rybnik. The experience of this first participatory budget in Poland is also interesting because it was undertaken in two fundamentally different districts of Rybnik, selected on the basis of contrast – the Orzepowice district usually seen as a “good” one, and Boguszowice, usually seen as a “bad district” in the opinion of the majority of the city residents. The first is perceived as a “decent” neighbourhood of single-family houses and the second as an area of blocks of flats, and

a community affected by many social problems. Without going into the details of the project itself, it is worth referring to its effects and conclusions described in the final report (see: CRIS, 2017) or to the opinions of people involved in the implementation of this budget. One of the most frequently mentioned issues is a "surprisingly" high level of involvement in budget procedures of the inhabitants of the district, which is stereotypically considered as "worse", in comparison with the low involvement of residents from the district considered as "better". In the district of Boguszowice there was also a greater level of cooperation between residents, as well as a relatively high involvement of young people, after which, based on the previously indicated stereotypical claiming, such involvement was not expected. In the district of Boguszowice was a greater level of cooperation between residents, as well as a relatively high involvement of young people which was also not expected, based on the previously indicated stereotypical way of perceiving this age group.

The project did not refer to the action research methodology, but because of its pilot and research nature, one of its goals was to deepen participants' knowledge. The knowledge gained by the Association regarding this environment allowed for the preparation of subsequent projects in this district in a way that gave greater possibilities to include residents. It is also possible to assume, although there is no empirical data, that the members of the community who joined the activities related to the participatory budgeting carried out in their district have learned something about themselves and about the effectiveness of jointly undertaken actions, which can indirectly indicate the level of their involvement in the process.

In the context of potential involvement of inhabitants, an advantage of participatory budgeting over other forms of Organization of Local Community can be observed. It results mainly from the fact that inhabitants may take activities, the effects of which are easily countable – it is a specific amount that they can directly refer to. In case of other projects (e.g. Local Activity Programmes, revitalization projects, etc.), an expected effect of a project is less clear, harder to imagine and measure. Therefore, it may be assumed that inhabitants will be more motivated to act. On the other hand, it is easier to involved in them, because the duration of realization of all actions related to participatory budgeting is short. Therefore, initial enthusiasm, usually associated with new challenges, is not decreasing quickly, which lowers the risk of fatigue and resignation from active participation.

The above argumentation leads to the conclusion that while planning extensive and costly environmental projects such as revitalization projects, they should be preceded with implementation of participatory budgeting according to the methodology of participatory intervention research. Such initiatives are usually costly; however, due to the losses that may result from failure of high-budget projects, such "investment" should be considered. The

following potential profits may be generated as a result of implementation of action research based on participatory budgeting:

- the members of community, and indirectly also representatives of local institutions, through cooperation on budgeting may help define norms, rules and values shared within a given community, that is, elements that may motivate local people to take part in common projects carried out in a given environment;
- people involved in the work on a budget in a form of action research may gain deepened knowledge of how members of local community perceive themselves with reference to the broader social context, and how they define their problems and needs;
- working together on specific projects, they build a network of mutual relations, which favours consolidation of confidence and willingness to cooperate, that is, the attitudes of social capital are formed or consolidated;
- cooperation among inhabitants builds a sense of causative power and belief that involvement may lead to changes in their (individual and common) life. It can help make people more independent and they can become more active in satisfying their own needs;
- practical realization of a common project allows the identification of the most effective form and paths of communication in the internal community, and with reference to internal relationships, building a positive atmosphere around the project and identifying and removing communication, social or political barriers;
- practical experience of cooperation gained in the course of work on a participatory budget, based on knowledge resulting from applied research procedures concerning efficiency and limitations on these actions, shapes specific skills, which can result in future projects having better cooperation from inhabitants and more efficient coordination of actions with various institutional and social players.

Conclusion

Enabling representatives of local civil society and, in some cases residents, to participate in the decision-making process in matters related to their place of residence, allows them to learn about procedures and formal circumstances of managing their living space and gives them a greater chance of influencing the activities carried out in this space. Indirectly, such inclusion in the decision-making process may persuade the inhabitants to accept a partial “responsibility” for the effective implementation and effects of the project conducted in communities in which they live. It should be

stressed that this consultative, deliberative way of making decisions requires acceptance by both parties of this process – the authorities and residents – and its principles. These principles include: actions based on good and clear intentions; acting in the name of the "spirit of law" and not just formal agreements; respect for the general public good; and representativeness and reliability (Długosz, Wygnański, 2005: 27). This responsibility is particularly important on the part of public administration, which very often treats the consultation process as a burdensome obligation implemented only formally. The same procedure and its principles should be taken in to account during establishing and implementing projects which in great degree will influence the community and lives of its residents.

The practice of social participation realized within the projects of Organization of Local Community, which results in the mixing of interests and revising old or creating new conflicts between various groups, institutions or communities, assumes that through dialogue, even if it is difficult, compromise and agreement may be reached, and as a result, cooperation during execution of a given project is possible. However, the representatives of local authorities and institutions subordinated to them and members of local communities must understand the nature of participatory processes. Whereas, the most effective form of understanding for them will be practical application of the approaches based on critical examination. Such an effect may be achieved through realization of specific environmental projects based on the methodology of participatory intervention research.

Planning the actions within the scope of organization of local communities on the basis of the rule of broad social participation with the use of consensual solutions, conducted from the stage of diagnosis of community issues to development of an action plan, implementation of this plan and evaluation, results in the creation and institutionalization of specific social and institutional mechanisms within the scope of preventing and solving social problems. Such mechanisms may activate spontaneously in the future, where there maybe the emergence of specific conditions which can help make the community more independent.

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Doing Participatory Research with Families that Live in Poverty: the Process, Potential and Limitations

Abstract

The contribution discusses a practical application of the participatory research approach in the field of poverty. The research was implemented with a high degree of participation, and the collaboration of some families who were living in a marginalized neighbourhood of Reggio Emilia, a small city in Northern Italy.

In the contribution, the potentialities and limits of this approach are presented. In particular, the benefits from the perspectives of all participants are described and analysed. The research process contributed to strengthening the co-researchers' capabilities and raised their consciousness.

In conclusion, a description of the usefulness and added value that participatory research provides to the field of social work and the future of research in this field is given.

Introduction

This paper presents a participatory research project in the field of economic poverty from April 2015 to January 2017.

Participatory research (PR) (Cornwall, Jewkes, 1995; Narayan, 1996; Bergold, Thomas, 2012) provides for the collaboration, as co-researchers alongside the professional researcher, of people who are experiencing, or have experienced in their lives the topic under investigation. Although this

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approach is still not widely implemented in Italy (Bertozzi, 2007; Marcu, 2014), the researchers decided to apply it in the poverty field to study its strengths and weaknesses.

This paper sets out to describe the steps of the research implemented by the authors and put in evidence the limits and advantages of using this approach in the study of poverty in the field of social work.

In the implementation of this particular approach, the researchers referred to the Relational Social Work (RSW) method (Folgheraiter, 2004, 2007, 2011; Folgheraiter, Raineri, 2012, 2017) because some of its methodological indications could guide them in some fundamental phases of research process.

The first section describes the RSW method and highlights why the researchers used that as the tool to orient themselves in the complexity of the PR process. Subsequently, the contribution presents a brief description of the PR approach and its application in the field of poverty. Later the paper illustrates the research carried out in Reggio Emilia, a small city in the Northern part of Italy, describing the steps followed by the researchers in its implementation.

In the second part the limitations and potentials of the participatory approach in the field of poverty are described, as observed by the researchers and those who followed the entire research process. In particular, the analysis of the benefits from the perspectives of all research parties is presented.

In conclusion, the authors argue that the PR approach can give added value to research in the field of social work.

The participatory research and the relational social work method

The authors and their research group follow the Relational Social Work (RSW) method (Folgheraiter, 2004, 2007, 2011; Folgheraiter, Raineri, 2012, 2017) in the professional practice of social work and they have studied its application in the research processes.

In studying the international literature concerning the PR approach (Cornwall, Jewkes, 1995; Narayan, 1996; Bergold, Thomas, 2012), the authors found an affinity with the principles and the theoretical basis of the RSW method.

In the implementation of this research, the researchers followed some suggestions of the RSW method that were effective guidelines for them as they wanted to achieve a shared and co-constructed knowledge production.

The RSW method, in the framework of relational sociology (Donati, 2010) and relating to constructive social work (Parton, O'Byrne, 2001), anti-oppressive social work (Dominelli, 2002, 2012) and anti-discriminatory social work (Thompson, 2006, 2011), focuses on relationships as the basis for change. It is a practice paradigm in which practitioners identify and resolve problems by facilitating coping networks (conceived as a set of relationships between people who are interested in a shared aim) to enhance their resilience and capacities for action at both the individual and collective levels (Folgheraiter, Raineri, 2017). The central idea of RSW is that change emerges from reciprocal help both between people in difficult circumstances, family members, friends and neighbours and between the network and the social worker. The practitioner helps the network develop reflexivity and enhance welfare, and – in turn – the network helps the practitioner understand better how she/he can help, even when the goal is to counter structural inequalities (Folgheraiter, Raineri, 2012). This approach uses humanistic and relational sensitive practices in social services because it emphasizes that users, carers and their relatives should all have a voice and as much power as professionals.

Participatory and inclusive methods of working are engaged in mobilizing and developing support and problem-solving networks. For this reason, RSW is a suitable approach for the researcher who wants to experiment with PR because it gives clear instructions on how to develop participation that focuses on people with resources and experiential knowledge and can support co-constructed knowledge.

The researchers who want to facilitate participatory research processes can find in the indications of this method practical guidelines on how to work with people in each step of the research, so as to support the exchange and contribution of all participants towards a common aim, in this case, a research aim.

The participatory research approach

It is difficult to establish the origins and the development path of participatory research because its diffusion has reached different fields and geographical areas. Some scholars highlight a connection between this approach and action research (Lewin, 1946). Others place its origins in the awareness and emancipation movements of Latin America in the 1970s (Freire, 1970).

According to Deepa Narayan (1996), there are two macro approaches in social research: conventional research and PR. Conventional research is characterized by being created by "experts", strangers or outsiders to

the situation being investigated, who collect quantitative or qualitative data about, for example, people, communities, organizations or situations, without “objects of the research” being involved in the process. Therefore, an experienced researcher who investigates and explores a subject or a phenomenon, even when it is represented by individuals, communities or groups of people, remains passive. In PR, there is a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the subject. The professional adopts an open and understanding attitude towards those who experience, or have experienced, the researched situations. The expert provides them with useful knowledge and tools to make them active participants in the course of research process. The professional researcher is no longer the one who studies the “research object”. The latter also becomes an active participant.

PR is therefore characterized by being implemented “by” the people who constitute the research target. Therefore, it is not only “about” them (Cornwall, Jewkes, 1995; Bourke, 2009; Fleming 2010; Littlechild et al., 2015).

The degrees of participation may differ according to the stages of the research. The concerned persons can choose not to participate in all phases of the research, and each person can decide how much time and energy he/she dedicates to each stage of the process (Faulkner, 2004; Aldridge, 2015). The central objective is the participation of the concerned persons. This also forms the core of the philosophy that underlies this approach. The group of people who consent to take part in the proposed research process will form what we here call the “steering group” (Stevenson, 2014). The fundamental idea is that the subjects, who are traditionally seen as “research objects” in the PR process, take on the role of co-researchers and communicate with researchers at every step (Redmond, 2005; Lushey, Munro, 2014).

Participatory research and the study of poverty

The concept of poverty in sociology does not have a univocal definition. Over the years, different definitions have been applied to this phenomenon. This led to different and varied ways of studying and researching the topic by using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Narayan, 1996). The difficulty of describing the phenomenon led researchers to involve people who have experienced economic deprivation first-hand. Therefore, this area represents an interesting field of application for the PR approach. In the studies of poverty at an international level, there has been extensive development in research using a participatory approach (Brock, McGee, 2002; O’Connor, 2002). The increased attention to actively including the

poor and socially excluded has led to their greater participation in the field of knowledge production (Appadurai, 2006). Involving the poor and socially excluded in the research process leads to a twofold advantage. First, it favours the possibility of escaping from the processes of impoverishment. This is possible by acquiring new knowledge, developing empowerment processes and establishing new bonds and relationships between the involved parties. Second, listening to the voice of those who live in economic difficulty enriches the knowledge of the poverty phenomenon with a new perspective: that of those who experience this phenomenon. This also allows researchers and scholars to look at poverty in new ways (Dovis, Saraceno, 2011). The participation of people who have experienced economic difficulties can help examine aspects of the phenomenon that were previously neglected, and their active involvement in the production of knowledge makes a substantial contribution to rethinking the policies and services aimed at fighting poverty.

In this implementation of the PR approach, it was decided to focus on poverty because the recent challenges in studies in this field at an international level have highlighted how the PR approach can promote both better understanding of the phenomenon and the co-production of knowledge that lays the foundation for processes of change in terms of policies and services.

The process of PR on poverty in Reggio Emilia

In the research presented here, the PR approach was tested in the study of both the impoverishment processes and the aid networks that are locally implemented to help impoverished families respond to different types of needs: food, housing, school and educational support for children, psychological and emotional support.

The chosen territory was a neighbourhood of Reggio Emilia, a small city in Northern Italy. The choice was made because in recent years, this Italian city has decided to invest in community social work processes. The researchers worked in this area as social workers, working daily with families experiencing poverty. This process favoured contact with people who were willing and motivated to accompany the researcher in the research process.

This city of 171345 inhabitants (in 2015) is located in Emilia Romagna, the region with the second lowest level of relative poverty in Italy. In 2016 the families classified as relatively poor represented 10.6% (Istat, 2017) of the families in Italy and in Emilia Romagna they represented 4.5% of the families living in this region. However, starting from 2008, the data confirm

an increase in poverty in large families and in working people (working poor) throughout Italy and also at the regional level.

This has led to an increase in the number of families who turn to social services for help in the city of Reggio Emilia. In fact, in 2015, 33.4%[1] of the beneficiaries of the social services are professionally "workman", confirming, also in this case, the regional data on the impoverishment of the so-called "working poor". The data show that 56.4% of beneficiaries (1512) are Italian and 43.6% (1167) come from other countries, mainly Morocco, Albania and Nigeria. In the Reggio Emilia area, immigrant families represent 16.9% of the entire population and the increase in immigrant minors from 2005 to 2015 was 59.9%.

The chosen neighbourhood – with 4352 inhabitants in 2015 – is characterized by a large presence of immigrants (33.2% of the area's population).[2] From the data, we can also deduce a strong presence of minors, in a higher percentage than the elderly residents, a trend that goes against the rest of the city. In fact, the city average of minors in 2015 is 18.7%; in the territory under investigation it is instead 22.4%. Furthermore, an in-depth study on information on immigrant minors reveals that, among all minors, immigrant minors account for 20.3% in the city, while in the chosen neighbourhood the percentage rises to 40%.

The chosen neighbourhood is also characterized by a vast network of services, both public and private, aimed at supporting people in economic difficulty. Different, both for legal nature and for mission, are the subjects that pursue this aim and each of them promotes and implements different policies and services.

The presence of large families and immigrant working people, with characteristics of high risk of poverty, as well as concentration of many social services in this area, were the features that made this territory interesting for the purposes of the research.

The initial research purpose

The PR approach gives the researcher the opportunity to define his/her initial research purpose through a query based on a personal thought, or on a specific interest of the entity commissioning the research (Faulkner, 2004). By starting from this, the first purpose is to identify the co-researchers who will support him/her in the investigation process. The first step is

[1] Data source: database of the Social Services of the municipality of Reggio Emilia (accessed: 14.03.2018).

[2] Data source: database of the Social Services of the municipality of Reggio Emilia (accessed: 14.03.2018).

represented by sharing and redefining the research purpose with the group of co-researchers (Narayan, 1996; Maiter et al., 2012).

The research purpose presented in this paper was defined in cooperation with people involved in the community social work projects and was initially formulated as follows: What aid networks do people in economic difficulties locally create to respond to their different types of need: housing, food, emotional and psychological needs, need for educational support for their children and so on?

The constitution of the steering group and the first steps of the research

The international literature addresses the theme of establishing a group of co-researchers with different points of view (Shaw, 2005; Beresford, 2010; Fleming, 2010). In this research, we chose to involve people who had experienced poverty in different ways. The idea was to invite into the group people who, in different ways, had experienced moments of economic difficulties in their lives, including both staff and volunteers who had worked closely with these people to help them overcome these difficult moments.

The composition of the co-researchers group did not represent all the types of subjects who had experienced poverty present in the territory, as would be found in a statistical representation. Following the recommendations of the RSW method, the selection criterion was the level of motivation (motivation assessment) of each member to invest time and effort in the research. The aim was to mediate between this element and the presence in the group of people who could bring, based on their own experience, different points of view.

> The established criteria were threefold: experience of moments of economic difficulty, personal interest in reflecting upon conditions of his/her own life situation, and a desire and ability to deepen the knowledge on that common experience by talking to others.

It was decided to start with individual interviews and the proposal of participation in the co-researchers group. We were trying to reach people who were particularly collaborative and active in community social work projects in marginalized neighbourhoods of the city. Furthermore, the social services providers were asked to propose the initiative to some of the people they helped who were also involved and interested in the topic and able to formulate ideas in a group context. It was also chosen to present the proposal to professionals and volunteers who were active in the fight against poverty in the area. During the individual interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of research and participatory methodology. Not all people to whom the proposal was made agreed to participate.

The research also involved the institution of the City Third Sector, the Solidarity Centre of Reggio Emilia ONLUS, which financed it. Thanks to its support, it was possible to offer economic compensation to the co-researchers who took part in the research (Bergold, Thomas, 2012; Nind, 2014; Aldridge, 2015) in recognition of their time, skills and knowledge (Faulkner, 2004).

Finally, the steering group was composed of seven men and women of different ages and backgrounds, who had experienced a period of economic difficulty, a social worker from the Third Sector body that financed the research and who, for a number of years, followed the community social work processes in the area, a volunteer of the Caritas Service from the local Church, and one social worker from the City Social Service Providers.

The steering group met to define the research process. All the steering group meetings were recorded to track the steps taken and were later analysed by the researchers to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research approach.

In the initial phase, the meetings were dedicated to introducing the team members, getting to know each other and exploring the research topic. Specifically, the research purpose was redefined in cooperation with co-researchers. Starting from the question posed by the researcher, the proposed purpose of the research was redefined with the members of the steering group. The group suggested aspects or elements that the researchers did not initially consider but were central to those who had experienced the phenomenon of economic poverty. Their feeling that the purpose of the research was also owned by them strengthened their motivation to participate in the proposed project and contributed to a sense of belonging to the group (Folgheraiter, 2011). In addition to what was presented by the researcher, the co-researchers considered the relatively less well-known reasons and events that led individuals to find themselves in situations of economic difficulty. The steering group expressed its willingness to investigate the impoverishment processes. The research purpose was expanded to include, in addition to the support networks established in the area, the study of the stories of people in conditions of economic poverty.

During the following meetings, the researchers explained the PR approach and its different phases to the other members of the steering group, including training; definition of the sample and of the survey area; definition and construction of tools; data collection; and data analysis and report drafting.

The international literature indicates how the group can participate either in every phase or in only some steps of the research (Aldridge, 2015). In the research case presented here, the researchers chose to offer the group the opportunity to participate in the whole research process,

leaving each member free to choose their own level of commitment and participation, with some ultimately participating in some phases and not in others.

In the training phase, the researchers provided the co-researchers with some basic concepts of social research. Thus, all members, regardless of their level of education and professional experience, could actively participate in the research planning and implementation. The purpose of the training was to explain to the steering group members what social research is, how it works, and to present the existing research methodologies and different tools available for data collection. Each method was briefly described with a presentation of its limits and potentialities, considering its concrete implementation in the PR approach and, above all, its contextualization with respect to the research purpose that had been redefined.

This training phase was followed by a discussion among co-researchers about different research tools described. The appropriateness of choosing one tool rather than another based on their practical application to the research field in question was considered. With the relevance to methods of data collection and analysis, a qualitative methodology was chosen because it was better adapted to the research topic and the group characteristics. The discussion then shifted to the available tools within qualitative methodology. Finally, it was decided to use an interview tool. Many members expressed their fear about their ability to conduct this phase of the research. The emergence of these issues made the group to choose the structured interview as the instrument. Having precise and well-defined questions that touched all the defined themes reassured the co-researchers. Furthermore, the co-researchers concluded that this would also help the people interviewed by facilitating their narration, which could be difficult because the subject matter caused them pain, because of linguistic difficulties or even because of feelings of shame maybe, whilst not breaking anonymity.

Defining the research sample

The steering group then defined the research sample. A discussion started between co-researchers on this topic. First, it was decided to focus on economic poverty, despite the realization that there are different forms of poverty, including relational, spiritual, and cultural. It was finally decided that it would not be possible to establish objective criteria based on income or held assets to determine who should be interviewed. Finally, the group identified the family unit and not the individual as the analysis unit.

It was decided to focus on families that showed signs of economic difficulty by asking for help and support and that had a caregiver burden.

As “caregiver burden”, the co-researchers defined families with a minor, an elderly person or a person with disabilities.

To find contacts, the steering group chose to interview people they knew and asked the services operating in the area to act as an intermediary in contacting families with which they had worked.

The main contacts came from a priest who had been the local parish priest for many years, from the social service providers and from direct acquaintances of the co-researchers. Furthermore, once the interviews were conducted, some family units provided contact information for neighbours or acquaintances. In total, 43 families were contacted for the initial availability request. Of these, 17 were not included in the sample due to their characteristics or because they were not willing to collaborate in the research. Therefore, 26 families were contacted with a second telephone call.

The construction of the research tool

The interview guide was created with the co-researchers who had personally experienced the phenomenon under investigation and could suggest thematic areas and topics that were unknown to or underrated by the researcher.

The steering group’s objective was to draft the interview and begin to identify the significant issues to be explored. Following the indications of the RSW method, the brainstorming methodology was applied. Each member was invited to present, thinking of his/her own knowledge or his/her personal experience, some topics that s/he considered interesting to investigate. The role of the researchers at this stage was to keep the group focused on the goal of the jointly shared research. Once the topics were defined, they were reordered by thematic areas. Thus, five interview sections were created:

- a section dedicated to exploring the current family composition, work and housing situations of the family;
- a second section containing questions on the impoverishment process;
- a section dedicated to surveying the aid requested and the aid received;
- a section dedicated to investigating the children’s needs and experience, when they were present; and
- finally, a section containing questions about their future and expectations.

The co-researchers then identified questions to be included in the interview guide for each section. It is important to note that for the research

in question, this step occurred in a participatory way, specifically with the collaboration of families who had gone through or were going through periods of economic difficulty and with family members of foreign origin. This avoided the risk of the presence of judging or devaluing questions in the interview guide or putting the interviewee in a state of shame or embarrassment. The way in which the question is asked is fundamental because it can convey attitudes of investigation or evaluation instead of acceptance and understanding (Rogers, Kinget, 1965). Additionally, the researcher tends to use words that may not be understood by the interviewed people. In the case presented here, fellow residents or people who frequent the same places and experience the same problems suggested terms and expression that the interviewees would understand better. Additionally, the group decided to include some inputs or stimuli that the interviewer could use to help the interviewee express him/herself.

Conducting interviews, collaborative analysis and data dissemination

The steering group decided that interviews would be conducted by co-researchers who had experienced first-hand moments of economic difficulty. It was thought that this would be more effective because the subjects included in the sample would relate with people who shared similar life experiences and would feel greater closeness and confidence. This sense of being fully heard and understood had the effect of making people open up more easily and share more detailed information. Additionally, the closeness between the subjects led to a reduction in the fear of judgement that can occur between the researcher and the interviewee (Littlechild et al., 2015; Lushey, Munro, 2014).

The steering group met at the end of the collection and transcription phases of the interviews. This meeting was dedicated to reflecting on and sharing the interview collection. The co-researchers shared the difficulties they experienced and the new awareness they reached.

The participatory analysis phase occurred within the steering group. During the group meeting, each co-researcher was asked to report the patterns that had most impressed him/her while reading the interview transcripts.

From this first exchange, four macro patterns emerged that everyone considered to be the areas discussed by all interviewees. For each of these patterns, the group identified sub-patterns by reading and reporting to the group parts of the interviews that they had underlined and “labelled” during the individual reading phase. During this sharing, the co-researchers enriched the codification of texts with descriptive and interpretive comments. In the participatory analysis, it was difficult to keep these levels separate,

as the co-researchers not only enriched the description with comments but often jumped to the next phase of a proposal for concrete actions aimed at change. In this phase, therefore, the descriptive, interpretative and evaluative analyses were superimposed and intertwined (Aldridge, 2015; Ponzoni, 2016; Stevenson, 2014). Furthermore, at the time of the exchange, the co-researchers enriched the comments to the interviews, sharing reflections and insights drawn from their own life experiences. The co-researchers who conducted the interviews were invited to share comments and reflections that emerged during the interviews, the meetings with the families and the visits to their homes.

Four particularly significant patterns emerged from the interviews and were highlighted by the co-researchers: the profound sense of loneliness experienced by families in economic difficulties; precarious work and housing discomfort; the absence of perspectives for the future; and the significant role played by the church in supporting the excluded. In particular, as stated in the conclusions, the idea that families in economic difficulty have of the concept of help was defined. The co-researchers chose to report the same analysed and reported data to all of the social workers and volunteers engaged in the fight against poverty in the city. For everyone, it was an opportunity to discuss and share the policies and services in the poverty field.

Limitations and potentials of PR in researching poverty

This second part of the paper reports the observations made by the researchers and co-researchers following the implementation of the PR approach. The international literature has extensively studied and reflected on the strengths and areas on which attention must be paid in the implementation of participatory research (Healy, 2001; Brock, Mc Gee, 2002; Turner, Beresford, 2005; Braye, McDonnell, 2012; Aldridge, 2014). The researchers, during the implementation of research presented here, have paid attention to several critical aspects to analyse the added value and the limits of a participatory research in the study of poverty in the social work field. It was possible to test its usefulness in acquiring knowledge about the phenomenon of poverty and observe the effects produced with the participation of co-researchers and the interviewed families.

The reflections made within the steering group at the end of the process highlighted some of its limits with respect to a conventional approach.

The chosen research approach required more time, and its implementation placed the researchers in some difficult situations without a simple resolution. The first was represented by the search for funding to

give the co-researchers some economic remuneration. This was followed by the search for people who shared the research purpose and who were available to be part of the steering group. An additional commitment was also required to manage group dynamics, as well as mediate during the phases in which decisions had to be made. Additionally, the data collection phase lasted for several months, from May to September 2016, and the number of interviews collected was lower than what could have been collected if there had not been the need to accompany the co-researchers in the process of contacting and dealing with the sample families.

Despite these limitations in the implementation, this approach led to a deeper knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated and identified directions for change. These objectives were achieved thanks to the implementation of several steps:

- the involvement of the co-researchers made it possible to reach families otherwise difficult to contact: they were not known to the local services because many of them do not ask for help because of shame or distrust;
- the redefinition of the research purpose by the steering group made it possible to investigate issues that would otherwise not be considered priorities by researchers (for example, the patterns about projects for the future or children's suffering);
- the participatory nature of the tool made it possible to insert questions at the core of the addressed patterns and to ask questions that were understood by the families, thus avoiding technical and devaluing language;
- the data collection conducted by co-researchers who had lived life experiences close to those of the sample families made the latter share more and overcame that sense of shame they could have felt if interviewed by professionals;
- the choice of a high level of participation, opting for the involvement of the co-researchers during the analysis and interpretation of the results, made it possible to achieve a deeper understanding of what was collected;
- during the journey, during the exchanges within the steering group, and in the collection and analysis phases of the interviews, it was possible to collect useful data for a deeper understanding of the poverty phenomenon;
- every phase of the project showed the interweaving of the research plan with the action plan: all the members of the steering group, including researchers, acquired new insights and knowledge; and
- empowerment processes and relationships of reciprocity arose due to the contact that occurred between co-researchers and interviewees.

The present research provided interesting food for thought to some of the parties involved in the process of combating poverty, who will be able to question effectively policies and practices in the fight against this phenomenon in the city. Thanks to the involvement of the co-researchers, it was possible to reflect on a different form of aid and support for poor families. What the steering group wanted to highlight was the idea that what is perceived as true support by those on the margins is not material help but the creation of relationships and ties within the society from which they often feel excluded. The interviews gathered and the personal and professional life experiences of the co-researchers have unveiled how important it is to be listened to and welcomed. At this point, however, it is assumed that what the steering group defined as the need to be "considered" was partly answered through research conducted using a participatory approach. This approach made the co-researchers feel like active protagonists of the research project, a reflection on and heightened understanding of the phenomenon of poverty that concerns them closely, thus allowing them to express their needs, desires and opinions on the topic. Additionally, the interviewed families had the opportunity to talk freely and to be listened to and understood, and in some cases, they felt "considered" and were occasionally supported or guided by the interviewers. For these observed effects, PR offers elements of change concerning action, at least in the experiences of those who participate, in this complex and unpredictable process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what the authors have observed throughout the process leads them to affirm that PR can be a suitable approach both to read poverty as seen by those who have direct experience of the phenomenon, and to foster processes of empowerment and change.

PR, in its different fields of application, addresses empowerment as both a goal and a natural consequence of the process of involving the concerned persons (Warren, 2007). By giving part of the power, usually in the hands of the researcher, to the subjects involved in the investigation, the perspective of the research is reversed or expanded.

During the PR process the researchers experimented the concept of empowerment and led to the realization of what Folgheraiter (2011) calls "relational empowerment", referring to the coping process which is activated in the helping relationship in the social work field. This is defined as the mutual empowerment. It occurs when the professional and the people involved in the situation of interest meet and connect. Both parties

make their own skills available and, in doing so, the empowerment process occurs not only in the subjects, who are defined as weak or vulnerable, but also in those who hold power. In the PR, the researchers knew that they could not know the matter under investigation as well as the people directly involved knew it. In the research process, dialogue and an exchange with the subjects led to true knowledge of the phenomenon. Thus, by including co-researchers in the investigation, the researchers experienced an empowerment process acquiring knowledge and data they previously ignored. During the research process, a reciprocal dynamic has been generated between co-researchers and researchers. What many authors (Kidd, Kral, 2005) underline is that from this union, new knowledge emerges. This occurred in the research planning process presented here. Knowledge was produced before data analysis: from the exchange and the comparison between the parties involved, new elements emerged in every phase of the participation process.

For these reasons, the field of social work could gain many advantages not only in terms of study and research, but to foster processes of change and dynamics of relational empowerment.

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Participatory Response to Needs of People Who Experience Homelessness: the Example of "Homeful – Homeless" Box Project[1]

Abstract

Social perceptions of homeless people seem to be deeply rooted, homogeneous and stereotypical. From that stems a stereotypical approach also to the needs of people who experience homelessness. Consequentially, that leads to a situation in which the assistance they receive is frequently inadequate, and thus ineffective. In that context, based on the example of the social model of disability, P. Beresford (2014) shows that it was not impairment that was the main cause of the social exclusion of disabled people, but the way society responded to people with impairments (Oliver, 2012: 43). Having in mind analogical perception of homeless people that functions in society, a thesis can be made, that it is not the mere fact of being homeless that is the reason behind the social exclusion of homeless people, but the way they are seen by others, and the way society reacts to them as a consequence of that perception. Beresford, among other things, suggests: to direct

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[1] The chapter was based on a presentation of the project that was made during a conference titled *Mieszkanie: prawem, przywilejem czy towarem? [An apartment: right, privilege or commodity?]* organised by Łódzkie Partnerstwo w sytuacji Wykluczenia i Bezdomności [Help providing Partnership in cases of Exclusion and Homelessness based in Łódź] and the University of Łódź between 20–22.04.2017. The presentation was titled: *"Homeful – Homeless" Box as the tool for working with homeless people* and prepared by volunteers and participants of the project: Marta Dekańska, Marta Karasińska, Karolina Karolewska, Małgorzata Kostrzyńska, Klaudyna Kubiak, Adriana Maja, Magdalena Mikołajczyk, Marta Pabisiak, Ewelina Pietrzak, Małgorzata Przygodzka, Marta Stefańska, Ewelina Ubik, Monika Wojtczak. Here, we would also like to thank the participants of the project, in particular Dagmara and Ewelina Pietrzak, for their reflections and that we were able to interpret the described actions together.

actions towards “targeting the disabling society” (Oliver, 2009: 51); to abolish the divisions between service users and service providers; and to enhance service users’ participation in social work education, practice and research (Beresford, 2014). Our participatory practice co-constructed with people who experience homelessness refers to those postulates through “Homeful – Homeless” Box [original name: Skrzynka “Domni-Bezdomni”]. It breaks down stereotypes related to homeless people by engaging different social actors; it abolishes the division between users and providers of services, because the boundaries between them clearly become blurred due to the activities undertaken as part of the Box; and finally, it includes users of services within different spheres of life, including practice, because it is them who become experts on their own needs and the actions they take, and it is them who become involved in helping other people, or who initiate that help. Therefore, sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between a volunteer and a participant of the project. The aim of this contribution is to recreate the actions that enhance the participatory potential of the social work project (“Homeful – Homeless” Box). The chapter starts with social construction of the homeless and its consequences with regard to the selection and the quality of social services. As a response to the problem of the social service system we present the “Homeful – Homeless” Box – the idea behind it, its evolution, and later on, also the social work with the homeless in the course of the project. Next, we present efforts to enhance the participatory potential of “Homeful – Homeless” Box.

Introduction

In our work, the key thesis is that it is not the mere fact of being homeless that is the reason behind the social exclusion of homeless people, but the way they are seen by others, and the way society reacts to them as a consequence of that perception. This kind of assumption redefines a typical relationship between service users and social workers while planning services for the homeless.

We can find an argument in favour of this thesis in the work of Peter Beresford (2014: 29), who refers to an approach to social work in accordance with social model principles, developed by Michael Oliver (1983), which provided “a counter to individualized case work”. He mainly points to the “disabling society” (Oliver, 2009: 51) as the main addressee of this model of social work. According to P. Beresford “equally including service users’ knowledge, enhancing participation in social work education, practice and research, are likely to advance its commitment to these emancipatory goals and participatory practice. This also offers the prospect of challenging unhelpful divisions between service users and service providers and is consistent with a real commitment to anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice” (Beresford, 2014: 36).

Our contribution fits into this model of thinking about social work. Our goal was to recreate actions that enhance the participatory potential of the social work project “Homeful – Homeless” Box co-created by volunteers (academic teachers, students) and the homeless. In the chapter we present social construction of the homeless and its consequences to

the selection and the quality of social services in our local context. Next, we describe the "Homeful – Homeless" Box, presenting the idea behind it and how it evolved (distinguishing the following stages: initiation of contact, building of relationships and "closing" the contact) and describing efforts that were made to enhance participatory potential of "Homeful – Homeless" Box. The contribution ends with conclusions on further areas in which participatory character of the project should be developed and enhanced.

Social construction of the homeless and its consequences to the selection and the quality of social services

Homeless people are frequently described by society in accordance with the ingrained stereotype as: "vagrants", "dossers", "tramps", "the ones who brought it to themselves", "alcoholics", "thieves", "people of no value", "dirty", "smelly", "always drunk" (Gramlewicz, 1998: 51–61). Often they are defined on the basis of their current social role, and such perception is often reduced to the way of thinking that they have been homeless "since the day they were born" (more in: Kostrzyńska, 2010). Observations people make in an instant about homeless people they meet in streets allow them only to make hasty assessments, depriving them of an opportunity to have more sensitive insight into the perspective of those who experience homelessness.

Numerous research studies, including the one carried out by Małgorzata Kostrzyńska,[2] show how unfair and simplistic such negative perceptions are. Participants of her study included homeless people with amazingly varied experiences, both personal and professional. They were educated, they had professional careers that definitely did not make them fit the stereotypical social representations about people with no home. The participants of the research carried out by M. Kostrzyńska (2014), which involved the homeless staying at a hostel for homeless males, listed numerous negative consequences stemming from homogenisation

[2] Here the reflections on the research study carried out by M. Kostrzyńska are presented, which involved homeless people who were living on the streets of a big city (in the years between 2005–2008) and people who were staying in a hostel that was created as part of one of the associations independently founded by a group of homeless men (between 2007–2013). The interpretative method of investigation applied to this research allows us to know the perspective of the Participants (in this case, the homeless). Additionally, social involvement of a person that plays a role of researcher-participant in the explored reality reveals areas of empowerment, but also difficulties that appear on the way. Similar research results are presented by: Tomasz Rakowski (2009), or Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas (2004).

of homeless people perceptions, which is represented in the empirical material presented below:[3]

> How people see us from the outside.....we won't help those drunkards, because they are doing drugs, they are alcoholics, drug addicts. Ok, so come and see yourself, instead of making assumptions about people. Others say: I won't help such trash (F)

> For others (passers-by, institutions – MK) we are almost like a plague. They don't feel like doing anything, they do what they need to do during their 8 hours of work and then they go home (Ł)

> Obviously, people look at you..... like you are someone from the margins. They looked at me like at some kind of charlatan (N)

> The society looks down on the fact that you are homeless. They treat the homeless as people of worse category (G)

> They simply treat such people....like they are on the margin of life (F)

Such a standardised, negative perception of the homeless imply certain ways in which representatives of mainstream society address them. The rule that regulates their social reactions to the homeless involves looking for objects typical for "that kind of people", that would fit their perception. In other words, type of a "matching" object reveals the hidden dimension of stigmatisation. An example of such stigmatizing matching of an object to "this type of people" may come from a situation from a hospital where one doctor wanted to give a homeless man new pair of crutches but the other doctor reacted to that saying that "such person should get an old pair of crutches, because after leaving hospital he would sell them anyway".[4]

The arguments mentioned above allow to draw a conclusion that fixed and homogeneous social perceptions of a homeless person definitely have an adverse effect on quality and effectiveness of help that is offered to the homeless by professionals, which was also documented in the studies.

The study by Kostrzyńska shows how the paradox of "institutionalised mercy" affects effectiveness of help. This paradox is expressed in the relationship between the professionals and the homeless, in which the latter do not meet the expectations of professionals, who base their selection of services provided to the homeless on a simplified definition of homelessness.[5] The author reconstructed interaction processes during which this paradox occurs. Her study revealed that homeless people

[3] Similar conclusions from their research are presented, among others, by Monika Oliwa-Ciesielska (2004) and Marcjanna Nóżka (2006).

[4] This example comes from the study of M. Kostrzyńska that involved homeless people staying outside institutions.

[5] Also the study of M. Oliwa-Ciesielska (2008: 186–187) reveal the contradictory expectations people have when thinking about the homeless. Workers at homeless shelters, or social workers expect them to be active, to care about themselves and to cooperate; on the other hand, society expects homeless people to be stereotypically apathetic and passive, and decides to provide support on that criteria.

create two types of their presentations to others: *as a normal person* or *as a homeless person*[6]*.* Usually, in the beginning they choose to present themselves as *normal people.* In such a situation the person involved doesn't stand out from people who have homes, it is impossible to tell that this person is homeless. Prolonging homelessness gradually leads people to lean towards looking "like the homeless" (that matches the look and behaviour stereotypically associated with the homeless that exists in society), because it guarantees that more varied services can be obtained. The words cited below clearly indicate that:

> I talked to the nun....she is on that X street....nuns from Mother Theresa of Calcutta are there...There are many of such homeless people, truly homeless who do not want to stay in a shelter, they say they don't belong there, because, for example, they want to drink booze...and they would be bothered that they can't do that...Plus, they don't want to keep physically fit and well groomed people there. I give you my word, I was there. I talked to the nun...sir...you are able to work, we don't need you here...you can go and earn money yourself, work for a month and rent a flat...We only take those who are on the very margin, those who sleep at the gates, who smell, whose limbs rotten, who have lice, who are dirty...And you seem to be perfectly fine... you are clean, well groomed...But, nun...I am just saying I only wanted to stay here for a while....That's impossible...(D)

That study revealed that social construction of the homeless speeds up the process of inclusion into the world of the homeless. Self-presentation that involved looking "like a homeless person" accelerated the process of becoming one in a mental sense. It happened because social reactions to people looking that way started to affect their identity. Moreover, such a person started to be drawn in by the homeless people who had lived like that for many years.

Summing up, social construction of the homeless leads to a situation when this category of service users gets inappropriate help. Stereotypical perception of the homeless can lead to unification of the ways in which help is provided, or that such help does not meet expectations of the beneficiaries themselves.

Studies carried out for many years by Maciej Dębski, the member of Pomorskie Forum na rzecz Wychodzenia z Bezdomności [Pomeranian Forum of Help in Getting Out of Homelessness], confirm that. Dębski, thinks that the inadequate, thus ineffective organisation of the system of assistance for the homeless, stems from poor participation of the homeless in defining the services (Dębski, 2011).

The action described in this chapter was supposed to show an example of a participatory help co-constructed with homeless people.

[6] In the text the *in vivo coding* is used which, as colloquial interpretation of the phenomena, is taken directly from the language of the field of investigation. In-vivo codes are components of "theories" formulated personally by the producers of the text in question (Strauss, 1967) (in the text represented in italics).

Such help should take into account the diversity among homeless people, their vast experiences and potentials. This makes up the main part of our contribution.

What is the "Homeful – Homeless" Box?

"Homeful – Homeless" Box is kind of a tool, which helps us to actively face the problems of the social service system for the homeless that is encumbered with the weak points that were mentioned above. The idea behind it and the process through which social services are provided will be presented in the following paragraph.

The idea behind the "Homeful – Homeless" Box and its evolution

The idea comes from Eugenia Wasylczenko, the graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. It resulted from her B.A. thesis titled *Każdy może trafić na ulicę [Everyone can end up on the Street]*, that was created in the art studio of Krzysztof Wodiczko. The main goals focused on preventing the homeless from feeling that they are the separated social group, the other members of the society point their fingers at. Therefore, the Box[7] was placed in the city centre, becoming an integral part of it. Moreover, the author of the idea wanted to achieve empowerment of the homeless. Sheets of paper attached to the boxes were handwritten by them, signed, and they often contained a short information about their lives. It gave others the opportunity to know the person, whose particular needs are defined, a little better without labelling that person merely as "the homeless person".

The project we implemented called "Homeful – Homeless" Box is a continuation of the original idea of the Eugenia Wasylczenko. It has been transferred to the area of Łódź in 2015 by Łódzkie Partnerstwo Pomocy w sytuacji Wykluczenia i Bezdomności (ŁPP) [Eng.: Help providing Partnership in cases of Exclusion and Homelessness based in Łódź].[8]

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[7] The box is the size of a big container. It consists of 12 drop boxes ("drawers" that can be opened). On each of them there is a list of needs of a particular person – the owner of a drop box. Gifts can be placed in the drop box, and they go straight to a box that is placed below, key to which is owned by a participant of the project and a volunteer. Pictures showing the Box and more information on how it works is available on the following websites: https://lodz.tvp.pl/.../skrzynka-domnibezdomni-stanela-na-pl-barlickiego; https://biuletyn.uni.lodz.pl/archiwa/10653 http://lodz.wyborcza.pl/lodz/7,154682,23046615,spirala-zyczliwosci-ruszyla.html?disableRedirects=true (access: 28.02.2018.).

[8] Currently the project is being carried out by the Centre of Social Innovations of the University of Łódź and by its interdisciplinary team consisting of researchers, academic teachers and students-volunteers.

The goal of the Box is to make it easier for the homeless to get out of their situation, but also to satisfy their basic needs, on their way to life stabilisation. It is a "link" between those who have found themselves in a difficult situation in their lives, having no home, and those who want to help, those people who have their homes and who are sensitive to suffering of others. This was described in one of the local newspapers:

> No fancy things – winter jacket, shoes, toothpaste, armchairs, pots. These are the dream of some citizens of Łódź. And everybody can help to make them come true. After several months of break, this unusual contact box that links the world of those who own things and want to share, and those who are in need and who dared to ask for help, is functioning again. It's white, it is the size of a container for recycling materials, equipped in paddle-locked drop boxes. On each of the locked drop box there is a room for a request. A drop box can only be opened by a person who owns a key. And everyone can put donations through a slot. If the requested things are too big to fit into a slot, phone number of the person in need or supervisor of the box is provided.[9]

People who help through the "Homeful – Homeless" Box can be sure that their support goes directly to a particular homeless person and that this satisfies the actual needs. Assuming that people want to help, but they often don't know how to do it and how to start, the Box offers some kind of a help that allows provision of support.

Social work with the homeless in the course of the project

Working through the Box is a long term process. First of all, it is possible to isolate particular, subsequent stages that it involves. Secondly, cooperation between volunteers and participants of the project each time requires that they individually adjust to each other, adapt, and modify actions, and this takes a form of a continuous interactive process leading to mutual understanding. At the same time, working through the Box is an attempt to create participatory practice co-created with the homeless.

The work involves the following stages: initiating the contact, building of relation and "closing" the contact – a synthetized description of which will be provided below.

Initiating the contact

The first stage involves initiation of contact, which means that volunteers begin to cooperate with potential participants of the project. Its aim is to initiate relationships and to set out rules of cooperation. This stage consists of several sub-stages: recruitment, conclusion of a contract and creating a description of needs.

[9] http://lodz.wyborcza.pl/lodz/1,35153,21196222,skrzynka-pomocy-poprosze-o-buty-i-paste-do-zebow.html?disableRedirects=true (access: 28.02.2018.).

Recruitment takes place in homeless shelters and outside institutions, which makes the process more varied. In shelters for the homeless meetings are organised during which volunteers present the idea behind the Box and the rules of its functioning, they answer questions from people who are interested in participation. Most frequently meetings involve individual/smaller groups conversations. On the other hand, reaching out to participants that stay outside any institutions usually takes place through street workers, who contact them on a daily basis. In such cases, street workers not only "chose" potential participants, but may also tell them about the Box, and they arrange first meetings between a homeless person and a volunteer, in which a street worker participates as well.

Once particular people declare that they want to cooperate a contract is concluded. The contract has a written form and it contains rules of cooperation between a volunteer (supervisor of a box) and a participant of the project. The formal character of the contract, the need for rules of cooperation and the obligations it imposes, upgrades the rank of the project and motivates those involved into taking actions. It contains the most crucial information which regulates mutual relations, for example:

- a name made up for the use of the project, written on the description of needs- this gives more anonymity to participants;
- rules of cooperation, such as the need for making of a list of needs and of its regular updating (satisfied needs are crossed out and new ones are added); or necessity for regular (at least once a week) checking and removing the content of drop boxes performed by participants;
- duration of cooperation, roughly defined for 3 months, and later on adjusted to individual needs of a participant;
- participants are allowed to resign from taking part in the project at their own discretion and they may be excluded for non-fulfilment of their obligations.

What is important is the contract includes obligations of both parties – the participant and the volunteer; therefore it is signed by each party.

After signing the contract, parties together prepare a description of needs of a homeless person. This stage allows us to reflect on what that given person really needs. Participants refer to their current stage in life, and what needs come with that. This way they are part of learning how to plan their future. That is why individual descriptions differ between each other, reflecting individual life situations of their "owners". Descriptions most often consist of self-introduction, short life story or the life situation in which a given participant currently is, a list of needs (material and non-material, such as job or therapy) and a contact phone number for a volunteer.

Building of relationship

The second stage of working with the Box, after initiating the contact, is building of relations. It is not only about the deepening of the relation between volunteers and participants in the project, but it is also about making relations that go beyond that and involve relation with the world of people who have homes ("homeful") which is reflected in the name of the project. The box is treated as a kind of a "key", a reason to work with a homeless person in a comprehensive way. This work, on the other hand, is always individually planned, depending on the individual situation of a particular person, and it is always done after consulting that person. This stage consists of several sub-stages: regular "emptying" of the box and updating of the needs, building a support network, starting of a "kindness spiral".

Regular "emptying" of the box and updating of the needs simply prevents the drop box from being overloaded and allows access to people who want to help, not to let the drop boxes be "crammed". On the other hand, it is about learning how to be systematic. It activates participants who took up the responsibility of looking after their drop box.

When it comes to updating (crossing out or adding) of needs, it is meaningful for at least two reasons. First of all, it forces participants to verify their needs on a regular basis, taking into account what they have already managed to get, or to define what new needs appeared depending on the way their situation in life changed. On the other hand, crossing out needs from the list allows the supporting people to realise that the person they help is "in the process", that that person's situation is changing. This in turn, positively affects their willingness to continue helping such a person in changing her/his life situation. At the same time – as one of the volunteers stresses:

> Due to the box we manage to motivate homeless people to be active, only if it merely requires emptying of their drop box. They regularly verify their needs, update their lists, they think about it.

Building of social support network begins simultaneously with that previous sub-stage. "Social support network" means a network of various connections and relations between an individual person and members of those networks, which creates a system of mutual connections, and thanks to that its members can feel safe and have a sense of belonging (Kawula, 1996). Building of a support network means making contact with different institutions that provide support for the homeless, for example in a form of food, assistance in employment searches, access to medical care, or social assistance. The offered help focuses on "assisting, engaging in activity, supporting, watching, participating and helping to skilfully utilise impacts from the community" (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2007: 510).

At that stage, the work of volunteers also involves helping the homeless to reach for different forms of support. In relation to the above mentioned approach in social pedagogy, it is important to constantly activate the participants so that they make efforts to improve their life situation, to assist them in those activities that may initially seem overwhelming for them.

The described actions enhance the starting of a "kindness spiral".[10] "Kindness spiral" is strongly related to the above described support network, and in a way is a ground base for building of such networks. It is mentioned here on purpose, to enhance positive things evoked by the Box, also among people not related with any institutions. Their help comes deep from their hearts, and it is not an effect of any professionally organised institutional operations. What is important is that the "kindness spiral" is based on the rule of favourableness, which is reflected in positive relations of people that are sensitive to needs of individual human beings, who encourage people in need to take independent actions, and who enhance their approach that focuses on "successful solving of problems that bother them" (Kawula, 1997).

"Closing" the contact

The third stage of working with the Box is "closing" of the contact – this is the moment when cooperation comes to an end, or it is rather a process that leads to that, as it not about one single situation, it is a series of activities that prepare participants for independent life, with no extensive support from volunteers. In fact, the process of "closing" of contact begins at the moment of the initiation of contact. It means that the participants are being prepared to become aware that they are themselves responsible for their own lives and that they should be aiming at self-reliance. It is worth highlighting, however, that in some cases, despite the closing of contact, the women who received accommodation, and started – to use their own words – *life on their own account,* had a strong need to keep in touch, phone contact at least, with the volunteers, to keep them posted about their current situation, to tell about their small accomplishments, or when they managed to handle some obstacles, which is represented in the following quote:

> Now I am staying in a social flat, and despite I am not homeless anymore and that I have started a new, better chapter in my life, I still cooperate with the volunteers of the Box. I know I can count on them, and I think they are wonderful people, and they are excellent at what they do. I am really glad that I agreed to participate in this action, and that I met people in my life, who wanted to help me and who are interested in my life and in a situation of my kids.

[10] Kindness spiral is a concept brought in by a social pedagogue – Stanisław Kawula. It means positive relations that appear in a given community of an individual, which not only enhance support provided to that individual but also his/her self-development (Kawula, 2002).

Efforts towards enhancement of participatory potential of "Homeful – Homeless" Box

Among our most crucial efforts towards enhancement of the participatory character of the project, the following can be listed: efforts to support voluntary and subjective decision about joining the project, actions in favour of participatory assessment of needs, actions aimed at inclusion of more members of the society into participatory practices co-created with the homeless, as well as efforts to enhance participatory effect on structural conditions of the situation of the homeless.

Efforts to support voluntary and subjective decision about joining the project

A certain number of people live in a shelter for the homeless. Most frequently those people know each other, they make close relations, they communicate and support each other. Therefore, that institution allows to "seed the idea" of the Box, and the information about it is in a way spread by itself. It helps in making a decision for those indecisive ones, it makes it possible for them to think about becoming involved without a rush, to talk some of their doubts over. Encouragement often comes from the examples of other co-inhabitants, who received help "tailored to their needs", which, undoubtedly, is a great advantage of the Box. The group of first female participants of the project who were staying in a shelter with their children, was soon about to get social apartments and to start living on their own account. That is why it was important for them that the project satisfies their actual needs, at that particular moment of their lives. In case of those people it was also crucial that the first volunteers were people whom they had known before, and who did not represent any assistance providing institutions.[11] It seems it had a significant impact on them overcoming the first problems connected with doubts that they had. Also the open approach of the volunteers was encouraging and the fact that they believed that the participants were the only "experts" on their own life situation who can best define their own needs. The volunteers encouraged them to fully participate,

[11] The results presented here show that homeless people often avoid contacts with representatives of institutions providing help (mainly those who live in the street), or they make contact with great distrust (inhabitants of shelters) because of their previous negative experiences. The fact that the volunteer introduced themselves as "outside" people, that is people who work outside assistance institutions those people they knew before, was conducive to making contact without the burden of previous unsuccessful attempts.

they did not judge, did not criticise, they allowed people to decide about themselves.[12] It made it possible to build a relationship based on trust.

In the case of the homeless staying outside institutions, their first meeting most often takes place in the presence of street workers. A big difficulty related to working in an open environment is to find a place to meet, that would be appropriate for having a peaceful conversation. The homeless "without a roof" move from one place to another, and those who "adopted" a piece of street space, are not willing to invite anyone from "outside" right away, and volunteers definitely fall into that category. Sometimes, a homeless person is ashamed of their own place of living, and avoids meeting anywhere around it. Safety of volunteers is another issue.

Very often cases of "self-enlisting" of participants occur, this is when they find out about the project through "the word of mouth", they see the positive effects it has on their friends.

Efforts towards participatory assessment of needs

Both for the volunteers and the participants of the project, the idea of the Box makes sense only when it responds to actual needs. Therefore, a great focus in the project was put on the participatory assessment of needs. This process involved numerous questions the participants had to ask, not only themselves but also the volunteers: "what can I need, after all I am staying in a shelter, and I basically have everything I need". The homeless explained that the difficulty to verbalise one's needs most frequently was related to the fact that the help they had previously received, was in a way of a "universal" character. Usually they were treated by institutions of assistance like all the other homeless people who are in a similar situation. Most of the people participating in the project were focused on basic needs, on life that is "here and now". Pondering about their needs required from them to "step out" of the present and to look into the future. Moreover, "pouring" their needs onto a piece of paper, in a way, made them apply some kind of "hierarchy" while making the list.

At the same time, it is worth remembering, that shelters offer basic help to their inhabitants, that allow them satisfy their basic needs, that are necessary to survive. They provide help to satisfy hunger, thirst, shelter, warmth and keeping of personal hygiene.[13] Being stuck in such situation for

[12] Such an approach is close to social assistance, which in social pedagogy requires balancing of relations between subjects of the operations (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2007: 135).

[13] In accordance with Abraham Maslow's (2004) pyramid of needs, first, the most basic needs should be satisfied, which are related to our life functions (need for safety, food, water) and later needs of higher rank can be satisfied (need for belongingness, respect, feeling of accomplishment or self-fulfilment).

a while, homeless people can stop thinking about other types of needs as they believe “they don’t deserve more”, or even “they can’t dream of more”. It was quite challenging to make the participants realise that they shouldn’t feel ashamed or apprehensive about being judged by people “from outside” in a situation when they ask for something that the homeless supposedly “do not deserve” or that it is “something they shouldn’t be asking for”. The participants often asked: “can I ask for that?” They were worried about being perceived as greedy, or that someone may think their needs are inadequate given their current situation. Stereotypical perception of the homeless by most members of society and the feedback they receive as a result of such perception may be the reasons behind the above mentioned attitude.[14]

Efforts towards including various members of society into participatory practices co-created with the homeless

Efforts towards including various members of society into participatory practices co-created with the homeless were carried out in two stages. The first one was involvement of those in their closest environment (most frequently roommates); the second one – involvement of more and more distant ones who constitute a support network.

Involvement of the closest environment revealed strong bonds between the participants of the project and those inhabitants of the shelter who were not participating in the project. The participants were not only sharing things they received, but they also included the needs of their co-inhabitants on their lists of needs. This was undoubtedly an expression of solidarity between them, who shared not only their living space, but who also felt compassionate about the similar life situation they were currently in. This is the way one of the volunteers describes this situation:

> We came into a conclusion that people who have almost nothing (from the point of view of people who have their own apartments, jobs, family) share with others with ease, and they do it in a natural and spontaneous way.

Mutual support among the participants has an important meaning also for implementation of the concept behind the Box. They reminded each other about their responsibilities, sometimes they helped each other with “emptying” the drop boxes, if a given participant was unable to do it

[14] The fact that such stereotypes function is also reflected in comments and discussions in social media which happened during the course of the project, which included critical opinions about particular needs of the participants, such as a hair straightener, kitchen appliances such as a mixer or a deep fryer. There were also voices from by-passers, who read the descriptions of needs, which implied that they were not entirely getting it: “why a homeless person needs a fridge?”, that was despite the fact that the description related to information about the future social apartment accommodation.

(inhabitants often work, look after children, take them and pick them up from school or kindergarten, they do chores in the shelter).

Apart from engagement of the closest environment, also involvement of a broader society took place in the form of support networks. At this point it is worth highlighting that the volunteers' task is not to do work for the participants in their cooperation with different forms of assistance, it is only about helping them to initiate such contacts. Sometimes the volunteers help by providing information about the institutions that offer assistance; they "bridge" between the participants and social workers, for example. They mediate in relations between the participants and institutions, or act almost like "spokesmen" of the homeless.[15] In such situations the participants – as they describe – feel more confident, and they are treated better by officials (they aren't sent off and treated as objects, officials devote more time to them e.g. by helping to fill in required documents).[16] As they stressed, "institutions of assistance treated them with much more attention and were more interested in them".

Among those who replied to the request for help from the participants of the project, there were people who offered to finance renovation of a social apartment, who collected equipment and furniture among their friends for a flat, who offered their coaching work with the participants, who helped to prepare art workshops or who organised help by informing clients of their own restaurant about the needs of the homeless and prepared packages with food. Also companies offering employment for the participants got directly involved in help, a big pharmacy chain offered cosmetics, among other things, but also facilities which organise leisure time for children who also experience homelessness while staying with mothers at shelters.[17] It also worth to draw attention to the enforcement power of journalists, whose intervention helped to accelerate granting of a social apartment to one of the female participants of the project (she got it overnight, while before she had been waiting for several years).

[15] About the roles of social workers, more in: (DuBois, Miley, 1999).

[16] The participants of the project often told about their difficult relations with social workers, or guardians. They often resulted from bad experiences or fear, that their parental rights might be terminated. One of the obstacles in making contacts with food providing institutions that distribute food packages turned out to be linked to a complex bureaucracy, with which they were not able to cope on their own.

[17] In contacts with people from outside, who declared their willingness to help, there were also difficult situations. Those involved instances when volunteers were treated as a cleaning service, when they were asked to pick up large size objects, or smaller ones but in large quantities, which were no longer usable or which did not match the needs of the participants. The fact that the volunteers did not agree to take them made those people frustrated. In those situation, volunteers were perceived as some kind of intermediaries in relations with all the people in need, those people claimed: "this may come in handy, you can give it away to someone".

These examples show how local communities support the functioning of the Box and how eagerly they get involved at its different stages, and how they are not indifferent to the new initiative. As the volunteers declare:

> The Box helps to break stereotypes – people start to realise that homeless people can have the same needs as they do. The Box provides not only material benefits, but it also contributes to making relations, building of bonds between the volunteers and the participants, between the participants and those who help.

That was how the Box has become a tool of "targeting the disabling society" (Oliver, 2009: 51), an actual link between the world of the "homeful" and the "homeless".

Attempts to exert a participatory impact on structural conditions of the homeless people's situation

The participatory impact on structural conditions refers directly to radical social work, addressees of which are groups that do not hold authority. Those groups comprise of representatives of social minorities, which vary in terms of their qualities discrediting them in relations with the so called majority. The general aim of the radical social work is to make a social change, to look for ways to build a new social order, which would change the balance between the minority and the majority. The revolution should at least concern changes in social and political thinking (Payne, 1991). Radically oriented social actions are supposed to lead to consciousness raising, to change the society in which that social problem occurred, instead of changing the individual people who struggle to meet the requirements set by the "majority". It is impossible to eliminate social problems without introducing a significant social change. The change should not only ease the effect of marginalization and improve social conditions, but also affect structures that lead to social exclusion (Fook, 1993; Payne, 1991; Webb, 1981).

In accordance with the above statement, attempts to initiate cooperation between the homeless staying outside agencies and social workers is the most basic example of participatory effect on structural conditions. Cooperation with social workers should be based, in accordance with the Act on Social Assistance,[18] on diagnostic interviews they carry out in the place inhabited by clients. At the same time, social workers were ready to meet the homeless who stay at shelters, or who temporarily stay at their friends, but unfortunately they refused to have a conversation in a staircase, in a car, in a park or other places where some of the participants of the project

[18] The Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance (Journal of Laws no. 64, item 593).

lived. This was the topic of many conversations with the management of the Local Social Services Office, in which we tried to explain that those locations were places those participants inhabit, and that they should not be using the Act to make excuses that they were "not allowed" to interview the participants in places other than apartment or rooms at shelters. In this case, the intervention of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights was not without a meaning. This organisation sent a letter to the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy with a request to review their stance and to present their interpretation of the provisions of the Act which social workers need to observe. The reply from the Minister, rather general, on the one hand did not resolve the doubts of the management of the Local Social Services Office because of the lack of any particular guidelines, on the other hand, however, that general character allowed broader interpretation. This way, it was finally made possible to make diagnostic interviews also in the various places the homeless people lived (out of agencies), and to include social workers into the group of institutions that support the participants of the Box project.

Another example of efforts taken to exert participatory impact on structural conditions of the situation of the homeless were the actions that motivated and empowered the participants to establish cooperation with people who have homes ("homeful"). The initial reluctance was usually linked to negative experiences related to the stigmatizing treatment the homeless had to deal with that came from people who had homes. As it turned out, not only the negative perception of the homeless, present in the consciousness of the local community, is verified, but frequently also the perception of an often hostile local community, that have functioned for years in minds of the homeless, is changed through direct contact with people that want to help. One of the volunteers writes about the engagement of the donors, which "helps to regain faith in people, especially among the homeless, who were seriously let down by them in the past". It was significant for the participants in the process of regaining faith and trust for people from "outside" – outside the world of the homeless. This is reflected in the followings quotes from the participants and volunteers of the Box:

> After difficulties in her life and the bad people she met on her way, she can finally relax and build a new home for her and her family.

> I didn't expect that people would respond to such an extent, because homeless people are usually not perceived well by other people. Thanks to the help of the donors I gained many things, such as beds, a washing machine, microwave, desks or cupboards. Those are some of the largest gifts, apart from that I also got a number of various things you need in everyday life.

> Thanks to the Box she started to believe that people are good. We managed to make her gather up her strength and power to fight for a better future for her and her kids.

It is significant that attempts for social integration that were taking into account the influence of the sense of belongingness (in this case of homeless people), and what comes with it also of responsibility and reciprocity (Hause, 1981 after: Kacperczyk, 1996: 21). As the participants describe:

> the Box is something amazing, it gives faith in people, who are not indifferent to the fate of either the homeless nor people who have homes; because their hearts are open to others
>
> …by taking part in this project I had an opportunity to find out that there are people who help others without judging them. I met many kind people.

To sum up, the efforts taken towards exerting participatory impact on structural conditions of the situation of the homeless, the most important was making the society more sensitive to and aware of what homelessness is.

As the volunteers reported, stereotypes were abolished about way the homeless were perceived by people who have homes, which is reflected in the following quote:

> It is about making the society more sensitive, and what comes with it, changing the way it perceives the homeless, and it's about shaping the awareness about the needs and life stories of the homeless, by showing society that homeless people are not only those who have a problem with alcohol, but they are also people who take different actions to change their current life situations.

Additionally, the following words of the volunteer, in a way it changes the thinking about the Box as a "tool" for helping the homeless, and shifts it. After that shift the Box is perceived as support coming from people with homes – that activates them to help others.

> Thanks to it the people in need are getting help, but it also makes people stop for a while and read the descriptions that are placed on the box, and to think about other people's problems. It helps people realise that there are people among us who, for different reasons, are homeless, that they have problems and that they are lonely. Thanks to that box we not only help the homeless, but we also raise awareness and activate citizens of our city.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to reconstruct the actions that enhance the participatory potential of the social work project "Homeful – Homeless" Box. In the contribution we presented the social construction of the homeless and its consequences to the selection and the quality of social services. We presented the ways in which we addressed issues of the participatory potential of work with the Box, among them: efforts to support voluntary

and subjective decision-making about joining the project, actions in favour of participatory assessment of needs, actions aimed at inclusion of more members of the society into participatory practices co-created with the homeless, as well as efforts to enhance the participatory effect on structural conditions of the situation of the homeless.

The experiences we gained during the course of the project implementation also allowed us to name areas in which the participatory character of the project could have been enhanced. We did not fully make use of the outstanding engagement of some of the participants to the advantage of the project. From the time perspective, we have a feeling that they might also have become volunteers of the Box, because there were evident situations when the boundary between the role of volunteers and participants started to blur. Words of one of the homeless people are quite symptomatic "help us, we will do it on our own", which also seems not to be exactly reflected in this project. In retrospect, we ask ourselves a question why we failed to hear that?

De facto, that failure to hear that voice reflects how our complex human identity and thinking about the homeless is flawed. On the one hand, we were academic researchers, on the other hand, we were promoters of the idea of the participatory approach in working with the homeless in Łódź. On the one hand, we perceived them as resourceful, on the other hand we did not listen to them carefully and failed to see their potential. This discrepancy in thinking about the homeless that was revealed, seems to be an example of difficulties that stem from simultaneous "immersion" into the academic discourse about homelessness and carrying out participatory projects.

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Empowering Community: Theatre of the Oppressed as a Tool of Homeless People's Emancipation

Abstract

In the chapter we describe a process and outcomes of a research project which aimed to find out knowledge about "social housing" for those who are poor, and how we can co-produce, within what action strategies, such knowledge. We take pedagogy of the oppressed as a theoretical grounding. Emancipatory action research is chosen as a research design, specifically theatre of the oppressed: a participatory methodology that can be used for knowledge co-production. In the chapter, we introduce screenplay of theatrical performance *Having Home Means Being Housed!*. Further, we present business with poverty in flats as a central theme. Specific action strategies were co-developed while performing the play. Key common issues identified within them are decisions not to give up, building solidarity and making the problem public. In the final part of the chapter we discuss the use of theatre of the oppressed as a tool of empowering marginalised communities.

Introduction

In social work, there are central principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect to diversities to be met by every practitioner. It is clearly stated (IFSW, 2014) that social work "engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing".

How are we going to achieve such goals in times of subjectivization and individualization of socially and institutionally produced risks that are

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being interpreted as a failure of an individual? (Bauman, 2002; Keller, 2007; Beck, 2011).

In the contribution, we argue, theatre of the oppressed might be a tool for engaging and empowering communities as well as enabling social work or social pedagogy practitioners to be in line with the core values of social work. We will present an example of the emancipatory action research conducted through theatre of the oppressed with homeless people.

The theatre play *Having home means being housed!* was played in communities affected with poor housing conditions and/or threatened with evictions. Our motivation to create such a play was to raise critical consciousness of those involved in the play as actors and as audience. We are convinced raising such consciousness is the necessary and basic step in the participatory process we engage in with disadvantaged communities we aim to empower.

We would also like to highlight the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation between social work and social pedagogy. Learning about group processes and creation of the theatre of the oppressed was reached through pedagogical means. The emphasis on community empowerment fits more with social work goals. This cooperation enriched our understanding of participatory and emancipatory processes within community settings.

In the chapter, we first introduce theatre of the oppressed, its theoretical background and techniques used in the play. We then introduce the theatre of the oppressed as a research methodology. Third and fourth sections of the contribution are dedicated to research results. The last section discusses the use of theatre of the oppressed as a participatory and emancipatory tool in work with disadvantaged communities.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Theoretical background of Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the oppressed is grounded in critical theories. One of the main authors of 20th century who influenced the method was a Brazilian pedagogue, reformer and advocate of unconditional humanity, Paulo Freire. Freire became famous for his conception of pedagogy of the oppressed, which was developed, as well as theatre of the oppressed, in reaction to the political and social situation in Latin American countries in 60–70s. of the 20th century. The author of theatre of the oppressed was a Brazilian director, dramatist, theorist, writer and pedagogue Augusto Boal.

Theatre of the oppressed is inspired mainly by P. Freire´s critique of society and by the method of Socratic dialogue. Freire shows various forms

of oppression in society when power is held only by a small group of the privileged who overpower others. The oppressed do not have an access to discussion about societal issues; they are unable to speak up, although they form a majority in the society (Freire, 2007). Augusto Boal (2006) understands oppression as a dynamic relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressed are, from theatre of the oppressed perspective, individuals or groups "who are socially, culturally, politically, economically, racially, sexually or otherwise deprived of their right to dialog" (Theatre for Dialogue, 2015).

With his conception, based on critical consciousness-raising through asking questions (Socrates dialogue), Freire wanted to strengthen the oppressed. Through dialogue he led the oppressed to "true" reflection and an understanding of their life conditions ("conscientização") and to an awareness of possibilities in their acting in order to change their life situation (Freire, 2007). According to A. Boal (2006) it is the theatre that can offer unique space for exploring and confronting various opinions and ideas and for searching alternative strategies of acting among the oppressed in certain situations of oppression.

We can say then, that the theatre of the oppressed is "a translation" of pedagogy of the oppressed into theatrical language. Augusto Boal developed different theatrical techniques to analyse oppression.

Selected techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed

Boal taught students according to Freire´s pedagogical principles to reach transformation from perceiving themselves as objects, as individuals who act as others, to perceiving themselves as subjects, through to being individuals acting autonomously (Babbage, 2004).

In this chapter, we would like to introduce three specific techniques of theatre of the oppressed, that help to achieve such transformation and were used in the process of the presented research.

Image theatre

In the image theatre participants materialize and visualize their ideas and experiences.[1] Created "images" can be concrete or abstract. Intentionally, language and speech are marginalized in order to create a space for other ways of perception, which A. Boal (2006) calls the theatre language. Research participants do not talk at the beginning of image creation, they

[1] E.g. Participants are divided into small groups. They are asked to make an image of "oppression", one after another. He/she can use bodies of other participants in the group, like a sculptor. The bodies are becoming his/her clay. The final image serves as a visual reflection of one´s image of oppression in his/her mind.

are noticing their own emotions coming to them through bodies of other participants placed in the image. They observe the image composition, face expressions, colours, mutual relations of the bodies in the image etc. The task is “to become aware through feelings”. Their knowledge can be further enriched by reflections of other participants who later share their feelings and thoughts related to the image (Boal, 1995).

Forum theatre

It is interactive theatre directed to people experiencing similar forms of oppression. The moderator of the performance is called the “joker”. The task of the joker is to mediate the dialogue between the actors and the audience and to provoke critical discussion about the topic.

In the forum theatre there is a story of the main character – “the oppressed” who experiences different conflict situations with the oppressor. The oppressed is defeated, because s/he is not aware of possibilities that would help her/him to free the oppression (Boal, 2006).

Spectators are invited to participate in the solutions to the submitted problem during the performance itself. The participants can replace the main character on the stage and try to act differently towards the oppressor, in the safe theatre space. The main aim is to change unsatisfactory situations. The power of forum theatre lies in participation of those who themselves struggle with the same kind of oppression and feel desire and need to change it (actors). It enables spectators to identify with the story and the main character. They are supported by actors to learn to act differently not only in the imaginary theatre world but in the real life as well. The overall goal is not to solve the oppression but to reach a fruitful discussion in the sense of critical consciousness rising (Boal, 2006).

Rainbow of Desire

The Rainbow of Desire is a family of theatrical techniques developed by Boal (2006) to analyse origins of inner oppression inside of a person. Analytical techniques permit us to uncover that oppression we feel as individuals (e.g. fear of losing the roof over their head), and has its origins in structures of dominance and power in our society (Boal, 1995). The Rainbow of Desire replays situations from our everyday lives and reveals invisible elements of our relationships, such as emotions, mental obstacles and desires that may be of hindrance or of help. We can uncover mechanisms of specific oppression, make oppressors more visible and transfer them from “our heads” on to the stage, where we can fight them.

Theatre of the Oppressed as emancipatory action research

Creation and production of the play *Having home means being housed!* copied individual phases of emancipatory action research (Ledwith, 2016: 152–154).

Emancipatory action research is framed within the belief that specific „wisdom", is contained in the lived experiences of those struggling with oppression. It enables us to co-produce new knowledge, which is at the root of "acting for change". Hence the main meaning of such research would be to achieve social change and to contextualize personal lives within political, economic and social structures in present day society (Ledwith, 2016).

The research was conducted from October 2016 till May 2017.

Selection of research method and research participants

The authors of the chapter (academicians, working at the university) together with ASLIDO – Association of People for Homes[2] decided about creation of a new theatrical piece. We chose theatre of the oppressed as a theatrical method because of our past experience with it. The authors of the contribution also held a knowledge about possibility of using theatre of the oppressed as a research methodology (Hendl, 2005) and offered the possibility to realize the whole theatrical process as a research process. We argued in that way the results of the process could be captured, discussed together and further developed. The authors also proposed to write an article at the end. ASLIDO members agreed, so we had all become research participants.

There was a self-selection (Miovský, 2016) of research participants from ASLIDO. Anyone from the Association could participate in the theatre workshop (one week in October 2016). The authors of the contribution also intentionally chose (Miovský, 2016) another academician and two students of social pedagogy whose role was to help with theatre workshop.

The workshop was attended by 9 members of Association (6 men, 3 women) and 5 academicians.[3]

[2] In the Czech original: ASLIDO – Asociace lidí pro domov. ASLIDO is a small independent NGO (formed in 2013 as a theatrical group focusing on theatre of the oppressed) whose members are people with experience of homelessness. It has a network of allies, who help to proceed with administration, facilitate meetings and are available for any support needed and defined by the NGO members. The main aim of Association is to improve life conditions of homeless people in general. The authors have a history of cooperation with ASLIDO for the past five years.

[3] 3 teachers (including authors of the text) and 2 students of social pedagogy.

Table 1. Research participants (members of ASLIDO) according to type of dwelling

Type of dwelling	Number of members
"Social housing – subletting" at private housing market	4
"Social housing – subletting" at municipal housing	1
Municipal housing of poor quality	1
Hostel – social work on site	2
Hostel – commercial	1

Data collection and data analyses

During the workshop we (research participants) collected and analysed the data together.

As data collection methods we used group discussions (Miovský, 2006), image theatre and forum theatre (Boal, 1995), as set out above.

We analysed obtained data within research phases of problematising, conscientisation and action (detailed further down in the chapter) through modified procedures of grounded theory (open and axial coding) (Strauss, Corbin, 1997).

We consider the whole research process as participatory. The research participants decided about the topic, research methodology and co-produced the knowledge (collected and analysed the data) in mutual partnership (of academicians and people with experience of homelessness and living in poor housing conditions). According to Arnstein (1969) partnership is one of the highest level of participation (and is classified as full citizen power).

In the text below, we will describe each phase of emancipatory action research (according to Ledwith, 2016) applied to our research situation in a detail.

Being

The first phase of emancipatory action research is called "being". It includes the identification of an issue or situation needing our attention (Ledwith, 2016). In the case of our research we attended regular meetings of ASLIDO. Some of its members obtained so called "social housing" in the past year and seemed to feel ambivalent about that. On one hand they were happy to finally arrive at a stable housing situation, on the other hand, they were experiencing technical problems with their flats. Some of the flats were also situated in socially excluded areas. The owner was either a private company or a municipality, renting the flats to NGOs that sublet them to ASLIDO members. The contracts were short term, extended each couple of months. The members had to use housing benefit to subsidise for housing costs. The rents were comparable to market prices on the local

housing market. There was a social worker assigned to each of them, but it was felt he/she mainly controlled duties of the subletting tenants to be fulfilled, rather than supporting people in their tenancies. In ASLIDO, there were also members who did not qualify for any “social housing” and were remaining in hostels. They felt injustice as they did not understand why they are not being selected for “social housing”. The group decided to look into these experiences in a more in-depth way through theatre of the oppressed. We together planned the one-week theatre workshop.

Problematising and conscientisation

In the phases of problematising and conscientisation we realized a one-week theatre workshop. First day we (all research participants) were searching for the main topic, trying to identify group emotions and interests (Ledwith, 2016). Our starting point was the above mentioned experiences with so called “social housing” and lack of access to it for some of the research participants. Second day we came across feelings of fear from housing loss in case the group would highlight technical issues with the flats or pointed out unavailability of it. This theme resonated with all participants from ASLIDO.[4]

We were able to formulate the main research question: “What knowledge about “social housing” for poorer people can we co-produce and what action strategies based on such knowledge do we choose?”

The rest of the week we had elaborated this question into a screenplay (detailed in next section). Reflecting on political context, it led us to incorporate theatre scenes also highlighting structural context of the whole housing issue (e.g. ethnic discrimination or poverty).

The screenplay and research were developed simultaneously. In open coding we focused on topics identification brought to the process by all research participants, their naming and categorization. Grounded theory method inspired us as well in the phase of axial coding, where mutual relations between categories are explored. We created a paradigmatic model emerging from axial coding that formed a basis for the screenplay. We understood the theatre story as a transformative paradigmatic model, told from the perspective of the oppressed. It served as a basis for further research phase (action).

Action

The action phase is typical for involvement of the broader community (Ledwith, 2016). We decided to perform a theatre play for people affected with poor housing conditions. The play was performed three times

[4] We also shared experience about a real case of not extending a housing contract to the renter in the socially excluded area when she complained about the mould in the flat and started petition in the community for better housing conditions.

(December 2016, February 2017, May 2017) at the community centres of the area. We (all research participants) carried out intentional selection of certain localities (Miovský, 2006).

Each performance was visited by 10-30 spectators (mainly inhabitants of areas with poor housing conditions).

Making sense

The making sense phase should lead to deepening of an understanding and identification of further cycles of development (Ledwith, 2016). We reflected upon the action phase immediately after the play, and also some days later, in an intense group discussion with actors. We were discussing co-produced action strategies and making proposals for further development of the play (where to perform next, adjustments of the play). We completed the whole analysis with open coding of group discussions (Strauss, Corbin, 1997).

Communication

The last phase includes communication about co-produced knowledge (Ledwith, 2016). In our research this phase remains open. So far we have published articles in academic journals (e.g. Černá, Polánková, 2018). But we feel more could be done to introduce the topic in to more public spaces.

Screenplay of the theatre play "Having Home Means Being Housed!"

The performance is opened by the joker, with a short story "Homes without people, people without homes" about selling a house with its residents to a new owner and its consequences, which gives an audience a social context for the play. Afterwards the audience watches a short video – an advertisement of the company PRD (Nice Family Homes) which offers housing in, at the first sight, good looking flats. The story is situated in one of these flats on offer.

There are four applicants who are interested in the flat – "debtor", "drunk", "Roma man" and "single mother". The first three of them are turned down under fictional excuses. After each viewing, the walls of the flat become alive and critically talk about situation of each applicant and the behaviour of the owner towards them. In this scene, the emphasis is on the message that housing should be a right for everyone.

The successful applicant is Martina, the single mother, who has certain income secured with housing benefit, therefore she is attractive to the owner. When viewing the flat, she sees everything through “rose coloured glasses” as she is led by her desire and need to have a stable place. On her first night in the flat, she dreams (“shadow play”) about her joy and happiness from the flat, as well as her fear from a difficult financial situation that she might not be able to cover all the housing costs from housing benefit.

After moving and settling in, defects in the flat start to appear (mould, leaking gas, old windows…). The owner doesn´t care. Martina decides to call a neighbours meeting with requests for help.

The audience, in the role of neighbours together with the actors decide some strategies, on how they are going to act towards the owner and go to her office (another room). There is the owner, Mrs. Lucky and her real estate agent Mr. Happy who start negotiation with neighbours (audience). They try to apply oppressive strategies, which we identified at the theatre workshop (e.g. requesting the name list of involved neighbours, delaying visits in the flat to see defects, singling out the individual from the group, intimidation, belittling, etc…).

The owner ends the negotiation. The audience hears her talk to the real estate agent behind the closed doors. She is unwilling to repair anything. After hearing that, the actors induce an atmosphere of demonstration. Another short movie is screened – an anti-advertisement for PRD company (this time Renting of Defected Flats), combined with the video from a real demonstration for decent housing held to support Residomo[5] tenants in October 2016.

A couple of days after the demonstration, Martina is served a letter informing her about not extending her rental contract. She turns to the audience with the question what to do next. The joker calls the audience and the actors together to small mixed groups where they look for strategies that are presented as images (image theatre). The small groups present images to each other and discuss them. At the end the joker invites the audience to join ASLIDO if they wish to be involved in a housing struggle in a collective way.

[5] Residomo is a real estate company owning over 43 000 flats in Moravia-Silesian region in the Czech Republic. The company is owned by international investment firms Blackstone and Round Hill Capital since 2015. Blackstone is by some housing activists in the USA and Spain accused of speculative practices in housing market (leading to forced evictions of families and individuals) (http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com, 2015).

Business with poverty in flats as a central theme

As a central theme of the play, as a phenomenon resulting from our paradigmatic model we (all research participants) identified issue of business with poverty in flats.

In this section, we will present co-produced action strategies as a reaction to that phenomenon.

Action strategies against business with poverty in flats

In the research phase called action, we played three performances, in which outcomes were captured through image theatre in the final interactive part. Co-produced action strategies (image theatre) were photographed, and later commented upon by actors of theatre of the oppressed (making sense research phase). Photographs were redrawn as pictures securing anonymity for participants. Here we present specific co-produced action strategies to deal with business with poverty in flats according to the participants.

Picture 1. Come to us, we will help you

Source: own research

Picture 1 captures an image of an evicted family. Neighbours and/or relatives are giving them a “helping hand”, accommodating them for some time. Actors later reflected upon a lack of physical space as an issue. Despite this inconvenience neighbours decide to help.

Picture 2. Social worker supports the family

Source: own research

On picture 2 that family was evicted. The social worker supports them at the hostel where they moved from the flat.

Picture 3. Give us back the deposit

Source: own research

The evicted family goes to the landlord to ask the deposit back. In this case actors commented the deposit won´t be returned. According to them the owner can always find some excuse for not returning the money. Powers are not equal, but the family resists, they do not want to be “robbed”.

Picture 4. Blockade: we are not leaving the flat

Source: own research

In this image a family decides to resist eviction by staying in the flat. The family refuses to go to the hostel. They consult a lawyer and defend themselves legally. It gains public support.

Picture 5. Tent on the square

Source: own research

The evicted family makes their situation public. They are protesting in tents on the square. They share their difficulties in a public space.

Picture 6. The power is in the unity

Source: own research

In this image people are giving the message to those who decide to fight against business with poverty in flats. The solution is to unite and don´t give up.

Picture 7. Collective negotiation with the owner

Source: own research

Picture 7 shows the owner who is approached by a group of people (crowd) to ask about stopping the eviction. The pressure of the collective negotiation can cause, according to actors, fear and further refusal of tenants´ demands or vice versa a surrender of the owner. Big crowd also raises needed attention.

Theatre of the Oppressed as a tool of empowering community

As academicians, we feel, together with Adams (2008), our role in the whole process was more of "practitioner/facilitator" rather than "practitioner/rescuer". Taking this role, we could, in a participatory way (enabled by using theatre of the oppressed) cooperate with ASLIDO actors, and later with the audience, on raising their consciousness towards self-liberation. We could observe the process of self-empowerment. Victims had become the oppressed.[6]

Main aspects of resistance (and signs of empowerment) identified by us (as academicians) in co-produced action strategies were the decision not to give up, building solidarity and making the problem public.

Decision not to give up is present in pictures 3–7. People decided not to accept the role of the victim and actively defend themselves.

Further, ASLIDO actors commented that decision not to give up could be supported by "gaining courage" (e.g. by seeing others resisting, having allies), having a sense of commitment and playing other performances.

Building solidarity is shown in picture 1 where neighbours or relatives offer help to the evicted family. In pictures 4, 6 and 7 there are allies, including a lawyer, who came to support the family in their struggle. ASLIDO actors commented that displayed and shared emotions and mutual sharing of stories/experiences are part of the process of solidarity building.

Making the problem public includes the political layer of blurring the boundaries between private and public. In pictures 4, 5 and 7 the family decides to fight for housing and decides to speak up or to act in a public space. To be empowered to do that, ASLIDO actors commented, there needs to be a realization of inequalities; for example, searching for a flat is not equal for everyone. There are different conditions for a Roma family, because of strong discrimination, than for others. With this realization there comes an abandonment of self-blame.

Challenges Identified in Empowering Community

ASLIDO actors identified also challenges that need to be faced, when trying to empower the community. Those are mainly fear (e.g. losing the roof over their head, although the quality of it might be low). Disadvantaged communities have not got resources to secure themselves an alternative, therefore the risks are not equally distributed between social workers/facilitators empowering them to act, and themselves.

[6] In our understanding the victim and the oppressed are both the target of the oppression. The difference is that victim gives up, while the oppressed decides to stand up to it and to resist.

From the point of academicians, we would like to emphasise here the point about the importance of a strong network of allies which can help with solutions in a case where there is a crisis (pressure of one or few individuals is too low to make a change). We would also like to mention “over-class” solidarity we can build by intervening in our own, mainly “middle class circles”.

Challenges might also include, according to ASLIDO actors, feelings of frustration resulting from long negotiations and never ending meetings, when things seem not to be moving fast enough and the lived reality for people does not change. Therefore it is important, at least from the authors´ perspective, to include direct actions or community events into the struggle. In this way, people take part in constructing their own reality, feeling they have a power to transform it.

The last challenge we as academicians could pick up on is displayed in picture 2, where the social worker helps the evicted family in the hostel. Although we acknowledge the importance of helping in critical situations, we would also argue this situation brings social workers to the role of rescuers. Rescuers (according to Adams, 2008) produce victims. In this sense there might be a danger in falling into the relationship of rescuer – victim, which is in direct opposition to the ideas of empowered individuals who can co-produce community.

Conclusion

In the introduction the authors of this contribution asked the question about the ways of engaging people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing in present day society. We presented theatre of the oppressed as a tool of raising critical consciousness and co-producing new alternative solutions of the issue we struggle with. We consider theatre of the oppressed a participatory method, where formal boundaries between social workers/social pedagogues and their “clients” are dismissed. Critical consciousness raising happens not only with the oppressed but also on the site of practitioners. Social workers do not stand aside, in a neutral position, they are involved, or rather engaged.

Within that we need to recognize different power positions exist, therefore social workers need to be aware of their position and where necessary apply “power with”, rather than “power over” approach (Adams, 2008).

In our research we have realised there are challenges that are difficult to overcome, such as feelings of fear and frustration or the position of victim. But we have also experienced we can overcome them through solidarity

building, encouraging ourselves and others for decisions not to give up, and blurring the boundaries between private and public, making struggles we face public and therefore political.

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HILARIA SOUNDARI*

Contemporary Scenario of Participatory Social Work Research in Rural India

Abstract

Rural India, holding 68.84% of its population as per the census of 2011 (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011), stands with an outstanding model of participatory practices in social work research. As the "we feeling" is common among the rural people, indeed it becomes more feasible to enable them to participate in the research process. Based on the divergent socio-economic and cultural background of the rural Indian situation, choosing the best research practices becomes a herculean task. It may certainly enable the bringing into the limelight the struggles and strengths of the marginalized and less privileged of the rural society. The present study strives in identifying the relevant research tools for rural population, which is relatively open to the participatory research approach. It highlights the relevance and suitability of adopting these methods in social work research, especially the collaborative research practices, combining the researcher and service users' perspective which are found to be more effective and informative. The various constraints and difficulties faced by the researchers also are portrayed and examined in relation with the rural study at the grass root level.

Introduction

Participatory practices are one of the vital components of social work research in India. As the community and "we-feeling" among the people is predominant, the grass-root level researches are able to be more participative and users centered. Thus the field of social work has emerged

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with a more open and wider understanding of systems, structures, policies, trends and developments in academia, practicum, research and innovation. It enables in enhancing the participation by providing a platform for researchers, policy makers, experts and relevant stakeholders to address social problems and issues. These effective responses to the changing dynamics of social work research involve several key factors, such as acknowledging the divide between knowledge and practice, learning from experience, and approaches from the scientific research perspective, documentation and dissemination of research findings. However, Indian social work research is yet to invent or formulate the relevant social work methods pertaining to Indian culture and to promote empirical research towards innovative social policy making. The present study examines the challenges of social work research and its scope in rural India. It highlights the importance of participatory research from the perspective of the less privileged and portrays the choice of tools of participatory research in the rural milieu. It also intends to display the innovations required in the effective participatory social work research in rural India.

Challenges of social work research in rural India

With the rapid social changes of the technological era and globalization, individual, family and community living are posed with numerous threats. Whilst their economic situations have become central issues for the families, sharing of resources within the family is seldom being done. In India, the fast growing unplanned cities and mushrooming towns is another major factor which affects the smooth functioning of the society.

Urban centred practicum

In India, almost 90% of the institutes and schools of social work are located in the urban area. The distanced physical proximity keeps the rural poor alienated by the urban based social work education. Even spending a week in the rural camp as part of academic studies, often this is done with high reluctance to manage this within the limited infrastructure. Large numbers of social work agencies such as older people's homes, de-addiction centres, juvenile homes, short stay homes for destitute women and mental health centres (Yanca, 2010) are placed in urban or suburban limits. Thus the social work trainees' mobility is limited to the urban areas. Thus their research arena is largely restricted to urban avenues.

Negligence of rural areas

As per the Indian national census (2011), 68.84% of the population is still living in rural India. Except for the students who have opted for community development who go for a single semester of rural placement, the professional social workers or social work trainees hardly reach out to the rural poor. In rural settings, the place of practicing social casework and group work are not often feasible. The non-availability of psychiatric clinics, geriatric care centres and child care clinics in rural India has limited the scope of holistic health for the rural population. Especially as the psychiatric patients need periodical checkup and follow up, due to distance, their mental health is being neglected. The limited exposure to the rural realities given to the social work trainees is seldom able to attract the social work professionals to undertake research in rural villages.

Scope of social work research in rural India

While Indian social progress is prioritized for its economic development, it struggles with uneven expansion of social opportunities such as regional divide, rural – urban divide, gender divide and literacy divide. Considering the regional divide, there has been a vast divide within the states. Among 35 States/Union Territories of India, only 14 were able to achieve development goals of the United Nations by 2015. For instance, in these under-developed states, malnourishment of children is even worse, as only 4 out of 29 major States of the country were able to attain development goals targets for reaching the targets for the proportion of under-weight children below three years of age.

Participatory research

Participatory research involves a whole range of powerless groups of people, the exploited, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. The key elements of participatory research involve people, power and praxis. In this regard, people are involved in the process of critical inquiry that informs the researcher. This research responds to the experiences and needs of people involved by listening, observing and taking stock of the situation. Power is crucial to the construction of reality, language, meanings and rituals of truth. Praxis recognizes the inseparability of theory and practice and critical awareness of the personal-political dialectic. People are part of the participatory research unlike the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), which

had been a bridge between formal surveys and unstructured research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and observation studies (Crawford, 1997). It had been systematic but semi-structured activity out in the field by a multidisciplinary team and is designed to obtain new information and to formulate new hypotheses about rural life. In this approach, people themselves collect the data and then process and analyze the information. Consequently the knowledge generated is used to promote actions for change or to improve the living standard of the rural people. In other words, people are primary beneficiaries of the knowledge creation.

Need for participatory social work research

Questionnaires used for collecting data are often proved lengthy, costly and applicable for the learned population. Tools such as an interview schedule are often used within rushed site visits by researchers to collect haphazard data from local elites. As the social work profession focuses on the target group of research the vulnerable groups are based on gender, caste and class. The details are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Target Groups of Social Work Research in India

Gender	Caste	Class
Women	Dalits	Poor
Adolescents	Tribals	Unemployed
Children	Nomads	Slum dwellers

Source: Author's compilation.

Other vulnerable groups include victims of HIV/AIDS, cancer, tuberculosis, malaria and physically challenged. The social concerns of malnutrition, anemia, diabetes, hypertension, etc. are some of the important areas of social work research. Juvenile delinquents, mentally ill, alcoholics, drug addicts and prisoners also remain areas of social work.

Concerns of participatory social work research

Knowledge generated by social work research can be the basis of sustainable social development. In this regard, three dimensions that demand attention and place knowledge at the service of development, convert knowledge into value via applications and sharing good practice

to ensure widespread benefits (V. Lynn Meek, 2009). These effective responses to the changing dynamics of participatory social work research involve several key factors, such as acknowledging the divide between knowledge and practice, learning from experience, approaches from scientific research perspectives, documentation and dissemination of research findings.

Combinations of professional social work

The blend of social work education, field work practicum and research are yet to find the right combinations. Often those who are teaching social work are alienated from field work realities. Those who are full time involved in participatory field work are seldom associated with the social work academicians. It has created a wider gap in the social work research. Change is a natural, but in a technological era, the changes are too rapid. In the social work profession the fieldwork is a positive factor, which exposes trainees consistently to these realities. Taking stock of these changes and converging them to the scientific research still needs greater attention. The field learning of participatory social work has a long way to go in blending it with the professional social work research. This blend of actively participating in social work practice and converting it as part of social work research can unveil the rich experience of being educated by the people at the grass roots level.

Contextualization of social work

Though the first Indian school of social work (Tata Institute of Social Science) commenced in 1936 (Chowdhry, 1964), the social work research methods or its participatory practices are still being adopted from the west and has not been contextualized or inculturated in the multicultural Indian land. There has been a greater demand for professionally trained social workers in south India especially after 2004 (Tsunami). It has paved a way for increased number of schools and institutes offering social work education and research. It has enabled the extension of fieldwork of people's participation and micro research at a different level. This enrichment of learning from across the practicum and the empirical studies can be seen as important to be shared with the larger community of professional social workers, for which the new technology including online learning, video conferencing can be applied (McCarty, 2002) in the participatory research. For the social work trainees, e-supervision can enable in expanding the boundaries of field practicum of involvement of the target population. In

the more recent trends, mobile apps and computer software are developed by schools of social work to enhance the participation and involvement of the target population, social work educators and the trainees.

Professionalization of social welfare

Social welfare administration in the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in India requires professional approaches (Sachdeva, 2007). The NGO sectors also are faced with various challenges. As the Government and foreign funding agencies have reduced their allocations, NGOs are facing an acute financial crunch. The Government has come out with strict rules and regulations, which in turn affects the enhanced contribution of the NGOs. Even the available funds in the Government can be possibly seen as being distanced by corruption and red-tape. It has limited the avenue of appointing professionally trained social workers in the NGOs sector who had been largely encouraging the participation of people at all level. As mentioned by Mariusz Granosik (2006), it is unable to meet the professional action of touching both types of realities of Government – Non Government sectors and synchronizing the bilateral needs, expectations and possibilities.

The social action model focuses on the review of social policies and practices that continue to disempower and oppress the marginalized people (Patil, 2013) in terms of their participation. But social action as a method of social work has not made much widespread impact in the recent past, in comparison with the increased practice of disaster management and development ventures. Though there are numerous human right violations such as female children's right to be born, educated and employed, they were treated more as isolated events than mobilizing the larger community.

Overcoming field realities

Despite some concerns of social work research with the participatory approach, and with the researcher being a budding social work professional, the current author in her post-graduation field work has been implementing the participatory research. Hilaria Soundari (2006) in her doctoral research with rural dalit women, who are in the lowest rung of the Indian caste system – in assessing their empowerment, found the participatory research had brought enriching information. Later in the post doctoral research on the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for empowering rural women she also revealed important realities in struggles, challenges and successes stories. In her studies, the author is highlighting the various tools in executing participatory research in rural India.

Tools for participatory research

Some of the tools of participatory research include transect walk, triangulation, social mapping, time line, seasonality calendar, trend analysis, mobility map and semi structured interview. They are presented below:

Transect walk and observation

The transect walk is undertaken as one of the initial step of entering into the village. It exposes the geographical frontiers of the locality and enables the researcher to have a panoramic view. During this walk, observation steps is an essential tool to undertake a review of physical structures, public spaces and private households. The following picture depicts the observation process taking place in the informal conversations with the rural women and the researcher.

Picture 1. Community interaction before map creation

Source: Copyright by Menaka

For instance, the transect walk and observation revealed that there were separate areas of housing in the different streets in these villages. The poor housing with no public infrastructures were the places the dalit women lived. The application of observation aids improvisation, particularly when carrying out diagramming techniques, were valuable.

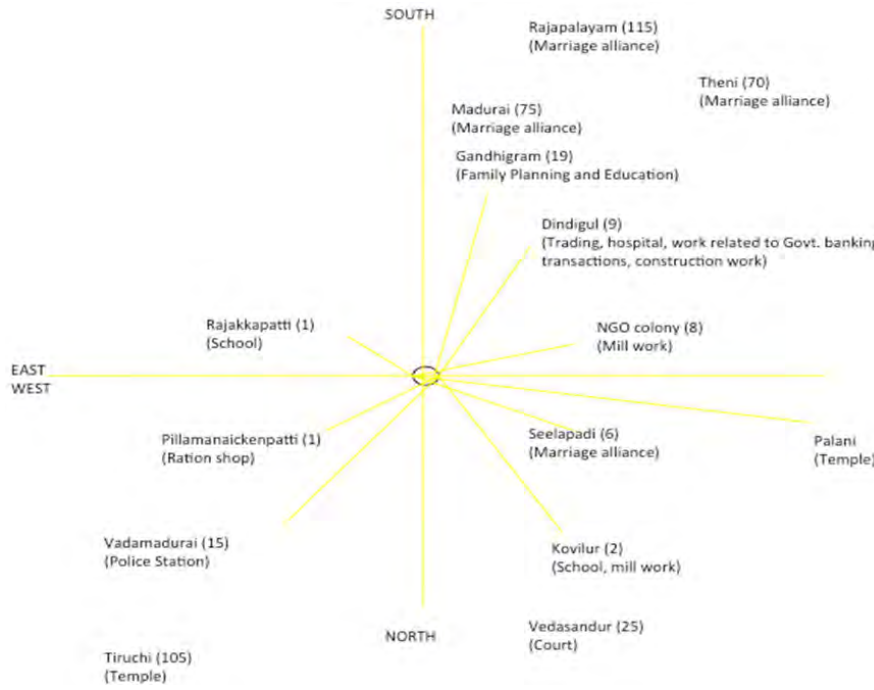
Triangulation

Triangulation is simply a method of crosschecking about the information collected from each method. These are often carried out in groupings around methods, discipline, individuals or groups, location, types of information, points in a discussion, to crosscheck the data and information of the credibility and validity with the oral and written sources. In the rural areas, the perspective of any information shared by the poor, marginalized and downtrodden often vary widely from the ruling or the elite groups. From social work intervention, triangulation had proved to provide holistic portrayal to a greater extent.

Social mapping

Social mapping is a most popular method of participatory research. It is a very effective technique to stimulate the participants to recognize the wealth of knowledge and skills in all communities. It is a vibrant and dynamic tool to assess how the rural areas are far from the main stream

Map 1. Social map of Kattunaickenpatti



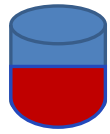
Source: own research

of life and how far they need to keep travelling to have access to basic amenities, communication, etc. The geographical distance and the lack of transport facilities have been barriers to improving their lives. Often their agricultural products and allied commodities are bought at meagre rates as they are not able to reach out to the markets easily. The social map also indicates from that particular village, how many kilometres the villagers are travelling to other towns and villages with its purpose of mobility.

Trend analysis

Trend analysis is yet another important participatory method. It attempts to study people's accounts of the past, of how things of importance to them have changed at different points of time. It is used to explore temporal dimensions with a focus on change. For instance, the water level in a village and how over the past few decades it had been increasing or decreasing can enable them to plan for further cultivation. It is also helps in understanding the dairy animals more, female birth rate, age at marriage, etc.

Figure 1. Trend Analysis: An Illustration of water level/irrigation in a village

Period / Irrigation	1997	2007	2017
Source of irrigation			
Number of wells	30	50	75
Water level in the well			
Mode of lifting water	Oil engine	Oil engine and electric motor	Electric motor only

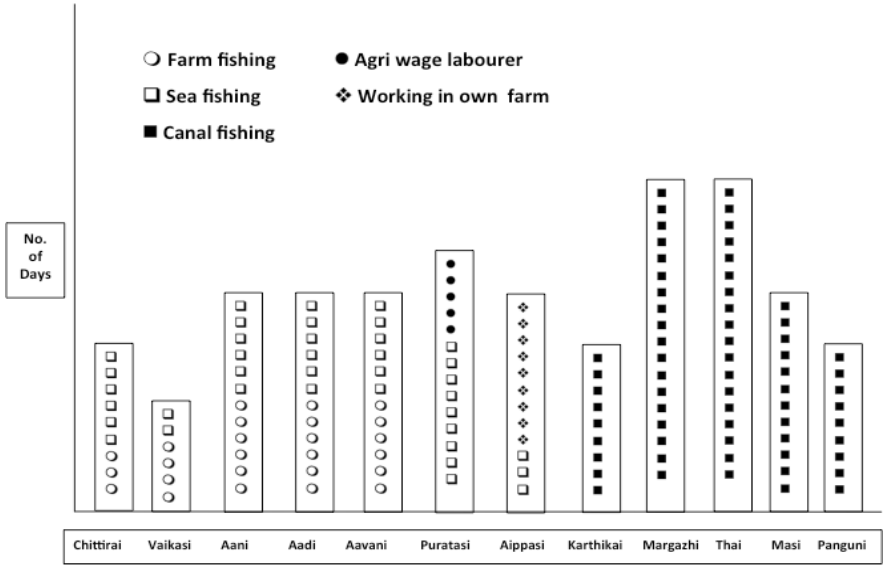
Source: own research

Seasonal calendar

Seasonal calendar is a diagram drawn by the people with locally available material to provide a model of trends in the main activities, problem and opportunities of the community throughout the annual cycle. Moreover it indicates the level of rainfall, time of planting or harvesting and

the season of the fish catch. For the researcher it enables prediction of social and economic trends of that milieu. Based on that they are able to make necessary arrangements too to plan for their productive activities and to be prepared for the adverse situations.

Figure 2. Seasonal livelihood activity of fishing



Source: Selvam V. et al., *Joint Mangrove Management in Tamilnadu: Process, Experiences and Prospects*, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai 2003, p. 65

Innovations in participatory social work research

Innovation can be seen as the process that renews something that exists and not, as is commonly assumed, the introduction of something new (Ponnuswami, 2011) in participatory social work research. Thus, innovation intends to make a systemic analysis of a threefold process. Firstly to understand the specific Indian socio-political, economic and cultural dimensions within a participatory research approach, secondly to analyze the documenting participatory research systems, and thirdly to look forward to strategies to nurture this research through adequate practices, policies and partnerships. The documentation processes need to adopt the latest technological developments. It certainly calls for the function of social work research academia to become a prime source of knowledge and innovation at all levels.

Theory building in participatory social work research

In India, though there has been a long tradition of intense fieldwork and active participative community involvement, very little from the research perspective of theoretical development has been contributed. It is vital to undertake research to address the present and future challenges in the social work profession in an effective systematic manner. In this way, participatory social research can be utilized for a range of purposes such as pedagogical and theoretical development, budget justification, risk identification, and monitoring for quality learning. This type of development calls for an extension of investigations, to venture beyond conducting and documenting programme evaluation, to tackle some of the more controversial and ambiguous issues currently encountered in social work field education (Maidment, 2003). For instance, rural widows, unwed mothers, aged people require greater interventions and theoretical contributions to address emerging social problems with intense levels of participation.

These various practicums of social work can be converted into participatory learning theories. For instance, self-help is one of the concepts introduced by social work practice in the empowerment process (Adams, 1996) and it was successfully implemented in organizing women as Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural India. It was viewed as one of the best social group work practices in the recent past. However most of its learning is minimized due to economic or microfinance factors, limiting its absorption into social group work practice.

Participatory thrust for rural social work

Though a large proportion of the Indian population lives in rural areas, it has not attracted and retained the trained professionals to work in rural and remote communities (Hodgkin, 2002). The previous research has identified the need for social work programmes to better prepare students for working in the rural context by providing rural subjects, rural content in other subjects, and rural field education opportunities (Lome, 2000). Thus the participatory thrust for rural social work has to be focused in social work institutions located in cities within a proactive approach to networking and supporting rural field educators and researchers.

Geriatric care in urban areas is largely managed by home nursing care and institutionalized care for senior citizens. These practices may not be viable from rural perspectives due to geographical locations, economic affordability and mental disposition to stay away from home. Therefore the search for alternatives is needed. For instance rural community based

geriatric day care centres may be preferred than being totally displaced from their homes. It may require the arrangements for commutation, entertainment and nourishment while mobilizing the participation of the local people in the rural areas.

Conclusion

Social work research in India is facing numerous challenges in its fast changing society. The search for knowledge and alternatives can be promoted by scientific research in relevant fields effectively with participatory approaches. Having viewed the challenges of social work research in rural India, it has highlighted the importance of participatory research from a rural perspective. As a part of innovations, participatory social work research in addition needs to have a theory building and interdisciplinary approach. The convergence of teaching and fieldwork exposure can enable standardized contributions to the knowledge store of participatory social work research. The rural centred research helps in reaching out to this large section of a neglected population. Yet, Indian social work research approaches are ready to formulate and standardize more relevant participatory social work methods pertaining to Indian culture and to promote the empirical researches towards greater innovative social policy making. This integrated participatory approach in turn would ensure the quality of social work research and support the relevant social policy making from the wider Indian context.

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Part II

Issues in Intercultural Participatory Social Work and Research

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Empowering Migrant Youth through Participatory Approach in Social Work

Abstract

Young immigrants have the greatest risk of exclusion in many European countries, due to educational inequalities, both in outcomes and opportunities, and to socio-economic family conditions.

The paper proposes a reflection on two projects involving immigrant minors in Italy. The first is a participatory research project on child labour/work conducted with a group of working immigrant teenagers; the second is a tutoring project conducted with immigrant university students to support foreign students at risk of failure. Through participatory approaches, the two experiences read differently the child work and the school failure of the children of immigrants, highlighting the different perspectives with which the two issues can be analyzed and addressed. It shows the potential of participatory methods in offering different perspectives and in empowering young people, as well as the possible implications for social work. The results provide useful insights for working with immigrant subjects in other areas as well.

Introduction

Young immigrants have the highest risk of exclusion in many European countries. Various studies and international surveys document the existence of educational inequalities between immigrants and natives, in terms of both outcomes and opportunities, and highlight the risks of failure and dropout (OECD, 2014). The cultural and economic capital of families

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affects educational paths, but can also affect other dimensions of daily life, such as the contrast between school and work experience at a young age, for example, and different cultural patterns and the family's socio-economic conditions affect this aspect as well. In many cases the disadvantage of immigrant children leads to a higher risk of exclusion from conventional training, although these children often don't have a negative view of their work.

In this respect, the paper offers a reflection on two projects involving immigrant minors in Italy. Through participatory approaches, the two experiences read differently regarding the child labour/work and the school failure of the children of immigrants, focussing on their lives and the direct involvement of the adolescents themselves. The first is a participatory research project on child labour/work conducted with a group of working immigrant teenagers; the second is a tutoring project conducted with immigrant university students to support foreign students at risk of failure. Both projects highlight the different perspectives from which the two issues can be analyzed and addressed, and show the potential of participatory methods in offering different points of view.

This paper presents the theoretical framework of the two projects, focussing on the challenges for migrant youths and working migrant children, and provides a synthesis of the features of participatory approaches. Subsequently, relying on the results of the two projects conducted in Italy, it examines the experiences of peer researchers and migrant tutors in order to understand their perspectives and contributions. The conclusions highlight the effects of participatory approaches on personal experiences as well as the possible implications for Social Work.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical references that guided the two projects can be traced back to three thematic areas: scholastic failure, child labour, and participatory approaches. Obviously an in-depth examination of each topic would require analysis of the vast literature, which goes beyond the objectives of this contribution. Therefore only some of references used will be referred to below.

A now well-established fact emerging from the studies is the persistence of inequalities in the school performances and levels of education achieved by migrant children compared to their native peers. This holds true in many European countries, despite differences between the national legislations, as confirmed by Pisa (2012) findings, which assessed the competences of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science in 65 countries and

economies (OECD, 2014). These educational inequalities are rooted in both their migrant background and other factors, such as social status, parental education, economic capital, aspirations, and different stratification of secondary school systems (Heath, Brinbaum, 2007, 2014; Griga, 2013).

With regards to Italy, students of immigrant origins obtain lower outcomes, have more irregular paths and lower rates in continuing their studies beyond compulsory education (Colombo, Santagati, 2014; Santagati, 2015; Barabanti, 2015; Bertozzi, 2016). Difficulties are greater when it comes to the transition between different school levels, especially in the first years of secondary education, and for students born abroad and reunited with their families in adolescence.

School failure is therefore a problem and aggravates situations of exclusion, making integration paths more difficult. Data on early school leavers also show the disadvantage of foreigners: in 2013 early school leavers accounted for 14.8% of natives and for 34.4% of foreign citizens (Santagati, 2015).

Nevertheless, the outcomes are not predetermined by the initial disadvantage and the agency of the subject can lead to unexpected results. Some international studies show that while the migrant experience (direct or indirect) has negative primary effects on learning outcomes (due, for example, to language difficulties, low level of parental support, mobility, and so on), educational choices can be positively influenced by migrant origins, and students of migrant origins can eventually decide to go on to tertiary education despite worse secondary school performances (Griga, 2014; Rothon, 2007; Kristen, Granato, 2007; Griga, Hadjar, 2014; Jackson et al., 2012). Choices are of course also influenced by the resources available and the support received.

The recent socio-economic crisis has not been conducive to reducing these differences in school participation and has highlighted the need for more effective work socialization (Lodigiani, Santagati, 2016). The intertwining of school and work is not new, but there still seem to be many challenges. Youth unemployment has reached record levels in recent years and at the same time there is a clear need for rapid integration into the labour market. Equally, the incidence of young people: *Not in Education, Employment or Training* (NEETs) is increasing and highlights a generalized crisis among the new generations, which are neither in training nor in work.

School-work alternation is a highly topical issue, yet at the same time there has been a drastic decrease in interest in child labour by public opinion and scholars alike. Until the early 2000s, scholars and research institutes in Italy investigated the conditions of working children, including in relation to school attendance (Teselli, Paone, 2000; Tagliaventi, 1999, 2004; Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2002). Some researches tried to analyse in detail the motivations and the meanings of the working experiences,

with a particular focus on immigrant pre-adolescents (Giovannini, Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Bertozzi, 2004).

The results show the specificity of migrant minors as well as their similarities with Italian minors. For example, for both Italians and immigrants the economic variable affects the likelihood of continuing education, as well as the parents' educational level. However, with migrant children there are also other factors at play. The meaning attributed to school and work can depend on the "migratory project" of the individual and the family. There may be cultural variables at work, as in some cultures of origin the work of children is seen as a legitimate contribution to family support (Bertozzi, 2004; Teselli, 2007). Socio-relational capital is also important: those who are more anchored to the ethnic communities can receive support and be included in co-ethnic networks of work activities, even if this type of support can sometimes produce a bonding capital with negative effects (Ravecca, 2009).

These studies have been useful in highlighting disadvantaged situations and the often negative impact of ethnic factors. Much of this research, however, was conducted within educational institutions and the investigations often did not reach the most marginal immigrants; in other cases, they approached the issues from the point of view of researchers, and potentially failed to grasp 'other' possible meanings for the subjects involved.

An alternative or complementary perspective can be offered by participatory approaches, which are particularly widespread in the field of Social Work. Unlike research conducted through conventional approaches, participatory research involves a bi-directional approach, in which there is a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research. The professional therefore has a listening attitude and includes in the research process those who live, or have lived, the situations under investigation; the subjects involved in the research share with the professional the knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated thanks to their direct experiences of life (Narayan, 1996). The specificity is the fact that the research is carried out with the people who constitute the research target and not on them (Cornwall, Jewkes, 1995; Fleming, 2010; Littlechild et al., 2015). So, the research process "involves those being researched in the decision-making and conduct of the research, including project planning, research design, data collection and analysis, and/or the distribution and application of research findings" (Bourke, 2009: 458).

However, there is no single definition of participatory research and there may be different variations of it. Participation can take place in different forms and degrees, but the goal remains to include those directly involved and to produce shared knowledge between academics and others, which brings new awareness to all those involved. "A central goal of the process is to

involve people as active creators of information and knowledge" (Narayan, 1996: 17). This production of knowledge constitutes in itself a possibility for personal and social change.

The outcomes of these participatory processes are therefore twofold: on the one hand, they foster knowledge of a given phenomenon, and, on the other, they have direct repercussions on the lives of the participants and can create the conditions for change in the realities experienced. This methodological perspective has assumed progressive importance also in work with minors, as shown by the numerous international studies carried out "with" or "by" children instead of "on" children (Brownlie et al., 2006; Wilkinson, 2000; Laws, Mann, 2004; Liebel, 2008; Kellett, 2005).

Two participatory projects: aims and methodologies

Ethnic minorities are often included in the category of vulnerable individuals, and they are often prevented from actively participating in research due to a variety of reasons (Steel, 2001; Panciroli, 2017). The same holds true for working children and adolescents who, especially in some cases, are at risk of social exclusion. The difficulties and challenges posed by their active involvement often discourage the use of participatory approaches, despite their great potential, since they offer different points of view and can have significant repercussions on the subjects involved and in the actions to be promoted.

The two projects presented below involved immigrant minors through participatory approaches. These are different projects, conducted in different cities (Rome and Reggio Emilia) and in different periods. However, we believe it is useful to review them together because they deal with issues that are often read in a specular way (child labour and scholastic difficulties), and because they are based on the direct involvement of migrant subjects in order to better understand the problems and adopt suitable actions with the subjects themselves rather than just for them.

The first is a participatory research project on migrant working adolescents conducted in Rome in 2007–2008. The second is a tutoring project run by university students with immigrant origins in 2014–2016 in Reggio Emilia to combat school failure among secondary immigrant students.

Both projects were aimed at improving the living conditions of disadvantaged people: research on child labour sought to understand the conditions in which migrant children work, starting from their points of view, and to improve educational policies; the Tutor project offered support to some students facing difficulties in order to tackle school failure and dropout.

A further goal was also to activate young people of immigrant origins, getting them directly involved in generating processes of understanding and change.

For this reason, the proposed reflections will focus on the activation processes and on the points of view of peer researchers and tutors of migrant students. Through their experiences we can see the contribution made by participatory methodologies. The projects will be analyzed separately, to preserve their specificity, but will lead to common concluding reflections on the implications of these methodologies for Social Work with migrants at risk of exclusion.

Participatory research on/with working migrant adolescents

The first project is a participatory research project conducted in Rome and promoted by Save the Children Italy (Bertozzi, 2010; Bertozzi, 2007). The aim of this peer research project was to analyse the work of migrant youth and explore its meanings and characteristics. Working adolescents are usually associated with poverty and social exclusion and, in this case, the research project sought to analyse this topic from a different perspective, enabling some migrant minors to take an active role in analysing the situation and proposing solutions.

The research team involved 12 immigrant adolescents, aged 15 to 18, with some working experiences, and from different countries of origins. These peer researchers were considered part of the research team, so that investigators shared with the participants their age, present and past experiences, life contexts and cultural heritage. The unique feature of this two-year research project was the pivotal role played by the young people themselves, which informed the entire research process and contributed to its definition, revision and ongoing re-adjustment. Peer researchers collaborated in defining research tools, they collected data, and interpreted and disseminated results (Bertozzi, 2010). In the second year, the research tools were expanded to include a micro-observatory connected with street-units, providing the opportunity to make contact with more working adolescents.

The research had two main goals: firstly to understand the characteristics of the migrant minors' jobs and the various forms of exploitation of child labour in Rome, and secondly to enable these youths to speak with their own voice, in order to understand their perspectives on the phenomenon and to promote their training and engagement as active participants, rather than treating them as passive research subjects. This also implied advocating for and with the young people involved in the project.

This process has highlighted the potential of participatory methodologies, where the involvement of peer researchers actually affected the analysis of the phenomenon and the methodologies used. First of all, the areas to be investigated were defined in conjunction with the young participants, starting from their perspective on child labour. This required the use of a wide and flexible category of work, to encompass all significant experiences and to reflect only later on the distinction between work activities, informal economy activities and crimes (such as theft). This process was important as it enabled the investigation of multiple experiences and understanding of the meanings attributed by minors to the activities carried out, with ongoing discussion and exchange.

The analyses have taken into account the influence of the different cultures of origin and of the migratory experiences. From the outset of the research, we tried to understand with the peer researchers the meaning of activities carried out in Italy, in the countries of origin or in transit countries, in order to compare.

> In Ecuador I helped my mother to sell things at the market ... I carried things from one place to another ... I did that every day after school ... for 6–7 years ... I liked doing this... but first you had to do your homework and eat... (Seller, Ecuadorian, 18)

> I've been in Italy for three years, I work in a pastry shop, I have to make croissants, put cream in them .... Six days, 8 hours, always working at night (from 8 p.m. until morning)... I've been doing this job for a year and a half almost, since I was 14 and a half ... my father found this job ... I work because I don't want to study ... I like this job ... Yes, they pay almost 1000 euros .. no contract .. I give all the money to my father, I keep more or less 100 a month for myself... (Confectioner, Indian, 16)

> I'm a hairdresser, I started working at the age of 14 ... I work seven days, the whole week, 10 hours .. I start at 8 till 12, then I start at one o'clock until eight o'clock ... the shop is open on Sundays too. I've been in Italy for two years, I started this job soon after I arrived in Italy ... I've always done this job, even in Bangladesh I did this job. I was also used to working in Bangladesh, there are no fixed times, payments are made every month ... when you want to open you open, when you want to close you close. Here the boss is my friend, from Bangladesh, in the shop there are two of us, the boss and myself. Money pays little, for me a little, 900 euros a month ... I pay rent, I buy clothes, so to eat, light .. many things at home, with the rest I send it home to Bangladesh... (Hairdresser, Bangladeshi, 18)

The research tools were designed with peer researchers: this fostered the use of simple language, also useful in the approach with peers, and helped to identify the most effective tools for understanding the various situations. Two professional researchers trained peer researchers in research methodologies to enable them to conduct the interviews. Over the course of the two-year project, the peer researchers interviewed 105 working migrant youth aged from 8 to 18, of different national origins and involved in 120 activities.

The findings provide a rich picture with many clues pointing to the existence of various problems, including a lack of knowledge of rights to

education, of workers' rights and of the rights to minimum working conditions in Italy; a widespread lack of awareness of what exploitation is, even in situations that present themselves as such; and a significant number of irregular situations such as the absence of a work contract or security and long working hours.

All the interviewees say they work to help their families in Italy or in their countries of origin, and the work appears to be connected to the possibility of improving their living conditions. Many minors do not have a negative view of their work experience, and the reasons they give for working are related to economic conditions, family situations and dissatisfaction with the school they attend. Thanks to the peer researchers, the approach to work activities was judgment-free, and this helped the whole research team not to consider the work itself as negative, but rather to see exploitation as the real problem. For exploitative situations, peer researchers discussed possible protective actions with the professional researchers.

The benefits of this methodology were also found in relation to the more confidential relationships established with peers in situations of social exclusion, in overcoming linguistic barriers and in engaging minors, who would have been difficult to reach by conventional researchers, in informal contexts. The peer approach also reduced the concerns of respondents to the contents of the survey. Obviously, this methodology required attention to ethical issues (Laws, Mann, 2004; Alderson, Morrow, 2004; Camacho, 2007), and thus, in each phase of the research, we tried to guarantee confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and protection from risks for both peer researchers and participants.

The impact of this participatory methodology places the empowerment of peer researchers at the centre. Young people have gained a greater awareness of the conditions and protection measures provided for workers in Italy, starting from their peers' work experiences and rereading them together with expert legal advisers and professional researchers. They have developed a concept of rights by considering concrete situations close to their experiences. The research experience has therefore provided them with useful cognitive tools to approach the work, but also to understand the society in which they live.

The importance attributed to work and the possibility of earning money was considered in relation to ideas about the rights and conditions that must be guaranteed to all workers and, in particular, to minors. These themes were also important for advocacy actions, designed together with them. Peer researchers shared the knowledge they acquired in informal settings with friends.

Thanks to participatory research, this experience has enabled us to investigate the phenomenon of work by immigrant minors starting from the subjects involved, reducing the power imbalances that often exist in

conventional research and recognizing the skills and roles of responsibility of the minors themselves. The research encouraged changes in the lives of the individual participants, but also in the interpretations of the agency staff. By its very nature, the research also required constant attention to cultural specificities and to acculturation processes derived from migratory experiences.

Empathy and support: tutors with immigrant background

The second project is a tutoring project aimed at tackling the school failure of a group of immigrant students from secondary schools in Reggio Emilia (Northern Italy). The project *Tutor in lingua madre* (Mother-tongue tutors)[1] was managed by the Mondinsieme Intercultural Foundation and by the Albero della Vita Foundation and monitored by the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia in the years 2014–15 and 2015–16.

As many studies show, the scholastic failure of immigrant students is a persistent fact. The aim of this project was to counter it starting from the enhancement of the experience and the linguistic and cultural potential of some immigrant students who had already faced and overcome the difficulties of school integration.

20 young people with immigrant background, mostly university students, were selected as tutors. Secondary schools identified 80 students of immigrant origins with scholastic difficulties.[2] Each tutor helped 4 students, the majority of whom were born abroad, had arrived in Italy some years before, had parents with low and middle school qualifications and had already experienced various kinds of failures in their educational careers.

Unlike the first project examined earlier, this was not a research project but an action-oriented project, even though the participation of tutors with immigrant origins has led to important cognitive insights. The project methodology was based on the "parrainage" tutor-student relationship, which focuses on common experiences and linguistic-cultural resources, to activate proximity supports. The tutors gave the students scholastic support but also supported their motivation and willingness to commit themselves to a better future. University students met secondary students several times a week, helping them with their homework but also sharing with them the difficulties due to their migration background (such as linguistic and relational difficulties with parents and peers). Being of immigrant origin

[1] See the Mondinsieme website (accessed: 23.02.2018).

[2] The project was carried out for two school years, with 40 students each year, although not all students participated on an ongoing basis and completed the project. Ten tutors per year were involved in the project.

certainly encouraged greater closeness and understanding of these difficulties, and being older allowed them to offer their experience in overcoming the initial obstacles. Moreover, the fact that they were university students acted as a positive example of success and investment in education.

The outcomes of the project can be read from the dual perspective of immigrant students and tutors. In line with the aims of the paper, we will focus on the implications of the participation of young people of immigrant origins as tutors. Indeed, the mother-tongue tutor was the key element of the project, initially born with the idea of enhancing language skills, then focusing more on the enhancement of the migratory background.

The tutors were selected on the basis of certain requirements (languages, motivation, countries of origin). Once the project group was set up, the tutors were involved in defining the methodologies, starting from their school experience and trying to identify with them the causes of failures and the support strategies. Once the tutors were combined with the students, weekly meetings began. The tutors also met regularly with each other and with a supervisor, for weekly monitoring of the project.

The tutors also worked with the families and the teachers from the schools, to encourage communication, which was otherwise non-existent for many of the students. The tutors also made an important contribution to the evaluation and re-design phase of the project.

The main motivation behind the tutors' involvement in the project was the desire to help those in difficulty. The tutors think they can use the sensitivity acquired through their experiences and their ability to read the family dynamics of known cultural contexts, and they believe in the usefulness of external aid.

The skills used by tutors are their academic knowledge, knowledge of the language and the closeness of their experiences. Their common migratory background in particular allowed them to share difficulties concerning relationships with parents and the experience of managing a dual cultural belonging. In many cases, the friendships born during the project strengthened the students' social capital.

> I think of how my family acted (...) the mother showed up at school but did not speak a word, she brought along her cousin who was a translator, but her mother's only concern was that her daughter did not miss school, not that her daughter was fine. My parents also had this concern, not because I lost school hours but because they were afraid I was doing something else (...) I was caught between two stools, I mean the two different cultures, so I can imagine how difficult it is (Tutor of Pakistani origins, female).

Looking at the needs of the students, the tutors perceived the following needs: to be listened to, trusted, to be helped in balancing the two cultures and to be supported in studying as the family members could not provide such help.

> I noticed a great need to be motivated and to believe in one's abilities (Tutor of Moroccan origins, female)

> I think students feel the need to be heard, to receive more attention and to recognize their commitment, for those who take it seriously (Tutor of Pakistani origins, female)

> In my opinion, as a tutor I was able to grasp the need for both homework support and emotional support (Tutor of Albanian origin, female)

> I realized that many of my students needed a hand with studying, especially in revising texts. Others needed someone to explain things to them with simpler and clearer concepts. Others needed someone to make them feel they were available to them, as someone to talk to, especially about family problems. And there were those who needed a little stimulus and appreciation to be able to give the best of themselves (tutor of Ghanaian origins, female)

Common national origin was also useful in the relationship with families, both from a language and a cultural point of view, although it was not something that could be taken for granted.

> There is no doubt that the most important factor was knowledge of the language, immediately followed by cultural proximity. Playing at home is definitely more of a facilitating factor (Tutor of Moroccan origins, female)

At the end of the project, the tutors said they learned to be more responsible and more organized, that they improved their ability to work in a group and to express their opinions and that they learned to relate with institutional actors, such as schools and families. The tutors were able to review and reread their own path, their difficulties and the results obtained, with different eyes. Even the possibility of using one's linguistic-cultural resources or resources related to migratory background allowed them to reflect on the potential they may have.

> We speak the same dialect. My linguistic resources, migratory background and family history are of great help in this case because our families are from the same country and we have grown up with the same way of thinking, so I will have no problem in understanding her (Tutor of Moroccan origins, female).

> Speaking the same language helped to make them feel at ease because they speak little Italian (Tutor of Chinese origins, female).

> The parents see that you are a successful immigrant tutor, this gives them more confidence (Tutor of Moroccan origins, male).

The students involved confirm the dual significance of the relationship with the tutor, which provided scholastic as well as emotional support. Looking at the educational success, only 65% of the students who completed the project succeeded. But school results, albeit important, were not the only objective pursued by the project. The students' comments point to the importance of relations and the empathy shown by the tutors.

> It helps me a lot with the language and makes me understand what I didn't understand, Studying is easier, It was an opportunity of getting support in studying,

> I need a place where we can study together, I studied with my tutor and passed the law course and now I'm fine with the subject, I need help and to let teachers know that I'm doing the work.
>
> My meeting with Mariem was the most beautiful thing, because I also regarded her as a sister, and I told her everything, the problems I had and gave vent to, when you're down, they cheer you up, and they give you so much esteem and courage, and that's what I need, we celebrated my birthday together. My tutor was very nice and congratulated me. Then he was always a like friend to us as, so he is very good as a teacher, but also as a person, the best thing was the first approach, which revealed that he was a kind and friendly person.

The involvement of tutors with immigrant origins thus enabled the issue of school failure to be addressed not just as a problematic area in the school path, to be resolved by providing support during subject study, but also to understand it in the light of the obstacles encountered by the children of immigrants. The tutors offered students the experience and understanding of people who faced the same challenges. This made it possible to better understand some experiences, to value shared resources, but also to activate children of immigrants to bring about changes.

Even with respect to schools and services, the project promoted a different approach to students with immigrant origins and second-generation immigrant students, seeing them as resources that can be engaged and activated to meet the difficulties of newcomers.

Conclusion: what implications for social work?

The results provide useful insights for Social Work with migrants.

Both projects focused on enhancing the resources of young people with immigrant origins. The goal was to produce a different understanding of the investigated phenomena and a change that would begin from the life of the subjects and work its way through to the social structures. The logic "with them and not for them" has therefore offered different perspectives on situations of early work or school failures, providing a starting point from which to combat social exclusion.

The power imbalances that may exist when a single point of view is considered (that of the researcher, of the academic world or of the professionals involved) can be reduced if the migrant subjects are placed at the centre when investigating situations that concern them.

A shared migratory background fosters more confidential relations and reduces linguistic barriers; it allows a constructive dialogue between academic researchers and peers/tutors on the categories used, and integrates the technical-professional skills of the former with the experiential ones of the latter.

In this sense, both projects enabled them to learn from each other. The researchers/agency staff were able to read the realities of young immigrants from a different point of view; the peers/tutors involved developed new knowledge about the situations and contexts experienced by the migrant youths and were able to understand their experiences in a different way.

Flexibility was important in both projects: the paths were adapted over their respective two-year periods, based on the contributions of the peers/tutors thanks to an attitude of openness towards what participatory processes could bring.

Both experiences gave rise to a process of empowerment of the subjects involved. Both the peer researchers and the tutors with immigrant origins show that they strengthened their self-esteem, becoming more aware of their own potential and, in some cases, this favoured the development of agentic power, or the ability to bring about a wider change (for example, to improve the scholastic experiences of other students with immigrant origins).

The experiences were an opportunity to bring into play personal skills and abilities or to discover new ones. The subjects involved said they had used and acquired different knowledge, skills and attitudes. These include specific linguistic and cultural knowledge (knowledge), listening skills, mediation, observation, patience, problem solving, responsibility and ability to work in a group (skills), and openness, respect, proximity and empathy (attitudes). These outcomes are interesting and can open a reflection on intercultural competences (Deardoff, 2006) that these young people have managed to employ or develop thanks to participatory methodologies.

These results show the possibility of adopting a different perspective for working with people of immigrant origin, considering them not as passive actors or objects to be investigated, but as subjects to be involved and with whom to build different narratives. Participation in research processes or in the implementation of actions can generate different forms of knowledge and discourses that affect social representations and attitudes. These approaches could therefore have some potential benefits for other categories of immigrants too, such as refugees and unaccompanied minors, who today are particularly vulnerable and also at risk of not having a voice.

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Participatory Research with Romanian Roma Immigrants Living in Polish Settlements: Methodology, Results and Barriers

Abstract

Systemic segregation and economic exclusion of Romanian Roma immigrants in Poland, starting in the 1990s, has deprived this group from the right to work, health care, welfare system and adequate housing. Roma encampments built from recycled materials represent the most radical forms of collective response to the problem of access to housing.

A group consisting of sociologists and activists conducted the first Polish sociological intervention studies with this community living in Polish encampments. The final report has been created in cooperation with Roma people. These studies show problems which this community is facing, making it impossible for the authorities to further ignore the presence of these people in Poland. The result of this research has been used to support social change in this community, and continues to support claims made to local authorities to change their policy.

In this chapter I focus on the analysis of existing forms of cooperation with this community and the challenges faced by people who want to enter into the emancipatory forms of cooperation with Roma immigrants, presenting the possible fields of cooperation and obstacles.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and to critically reflect upon results of participatory cooperation between Romanian Roma immigrants living in Polish settlements and activist-researchers, with special attention given to barriers experienced in the course of the study.

In the chapter, I view engagement with the subject of Romanian Roma's situation in Poland as significant in the context of the debate concentrating

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not so much on ethnicity (as in Roma studies, Gypsy studies), but on the social, economic, and political situation of foreign nationals in Poland.

Most of the Roma of Romanian origin living in Poland do not have the citizenship nor registration of residence, and thus no access to basic rights or the possibility to represent their interests is given. The research being presented in this contribution was the first participatory country-wide study of the social situation of camping-out Roma (living in independently-built encampments). The project was conducted in 2015 to diagnose the situation, and to implement social and political changes in the future. Another aim was to enter into a cooperation with the Roma, so that the joint presentation of research findings could include them in the public debate, since up to that point the national authorities and local governments either pretended not to notice their presence, or acted in such a way as to maintain their lack of voice under the status of "illegal immigrants". To answer to this rhetoric and the problems related to economic and political exclusion, it was necessary to implement participatory practices. Preparing for the research, as an activist engaged in work with Roma community in Poland since 2012, I purposefully deployed a methodological approach characteristic for militant research, building on the works of Deanna Dadusc (2014), David Croteau, William Hoynes and Charlotte Ryan (2005), among others.

The goal of this contribution is to describe the situation of Roma in the context of Polish migration policy towards poor foreign nationals, and to present the results of the undertaken attempts of participatory, non-paternalistic cooperation between the Roma and the researchers and activists as well as introduce the readers into the barriers experienced in the course of such research.

I will start with description of the research inspiration and process in order to later segue to answer the question of how its realisation became possible, as well as how we used the research results in the form of a report and a documentary film. The second part will focus on conclusions from the research, attempting to analyse the current forms of cooperation with Roma community. I will also discuss challenges faced by researchers and activists oriented on working with Roma community.

Roma as a "problem" in Europe and Poland **– justification of participatory practices**

After the fall of the Ceausescu dictatorship and the revolution in Romania which took place in 1989, the volume of Roma migration to European countries increased (Kostka, 2015). After the revolution and the systemic transformation, Roma were the first group to lose their jobs (e.g. in agricultural facilities and

on farms, where during the communist dictatorship they were directed to work as a cheap, low-skilled labour force). Always treated as second-class citizens in Romania, they have not gained access to the labour market and the ability to improve their qualifications after the fall of the dictatorship. They were also losing flats. Currently, as a result of processes related to gentrification and programmes based on the principles of neoliberal urban policy of "cleansing cities" from poor people, Roma remain a class with the greatest threat of displacement as a result of successive evictions from the city centre. Debt was not always the reason, but also city investments or a change of the foregoing function of the buildings inhabited by Roma.

Acquisition of precise data specifying the range of their migration is very difficult. During his dictatorship, Ceausescu regularly avoided political discussion on the subject of Roma. At one point he announced that Roma do not exist in Romania, hence there are no problems related to this community. At a later point and during the recent National Population Censuses carried out in Romania, a significant number of Roma did not admit their ethnic origin. This decision is related to a high level of segregation and discrimination of this minority. The available official data, therefore, can be significantly understated in relation to the actual number of Roma inhabiting Romanian cities and villages.

Increase in the emigration of Roma from Romania occurred in relation to the Romanian accession to the EU (2007). To Roma, migration gave hope for the improvement of financial status and respect of their rights. Statistics concerning migration of Roma to EU countries after 2007 – namely after the accession of Romania to the European Union – are not available neither; crossing of the border is visa-free, hence, despite the fact that Romania is not in the Shengen zone, movement of Roma peoples is not a subject of statistical analyses. Some of them chose Poland and here we have the analogical situation. Poland does not keep the record of Romanian Roma living and born on the territory of the country as in Poland Roma of Romanian origin are not recognised as a national minority.

The main reasons for choosing Poland declared by Roma people were socio-material motivations and possibilities related to the basic knowledge of Polish language, their own previous migrations to Poland in childhood (when they would often be deported back), or experiences of previous generations, relatives and friends. Currently, the Roma who live in encampments on the territory of Poland arrived in search of better work and life conditions, mainly from villages located near the cities of Sibiu Vistea de Jos, Fagaras and Brasov, and from Transylvania.

When it comes to the formal-legal status, Romanian Roma are treated as "guests", legally visiting "tourists from another EU country", at the same time it is often categorically denied that they have been living on the territory of Poland for years, despite the fact that a large number of them were

born in Poland. Roma immigrants, residing in Poland for over two decades, struggle with poverty and significant limitation of opportunities for social advancement.

Romanian Roma have a rather limited contact with Roma holding Polish citizenship (regardless of cultural differences between the groups – different language dialects, traditions, customs – economic disparities play a significant role). Support operations for members of Roma associations and expressions of outrage in relation to, for example, illegal evictions of encampments are rare. A significant role in the mutual relations with others is played out by the differences resulting from their hierarchy in the social ladder. They are perceived as beggars, living in self-made settlements (encampments), hence there are occurrences of acts of aggression and ascribing specific characteristics to this group - social parasitism, laziness, reluctance to take up work and abuse of the social benefits system. The phenomenon of economic racism, consists in essentialisation (Blaut, 1992) and attribution of certain characteristics to a specific community due to extreme poverty, regardless of nationality.[1]

At least from the 1990s up until 2014, not a single governmental institution (including those subsidized with EU funds) cooperated with Romanian Roma, while there were some institutions cooperating with Roma holding Polish citizenship. EU funds allocated for the integration of Roma and enabling the use of a range of programmes, could not, and to a large extent still cannot, be allocated for financing activities related to support for the Roma immigrants of Romanian origin living in Poland. Governmental statistics concerning aid programmes do not include those who are in the worst situation. (They include only the Roma constituting the official minority in Poland, having a regulated legal status or citizenship). From the formal point of view, therefore, this community for many years has been “invisible” (no records in the system, no registration of stay, or an official address of residence), while the only activities undertaken by city councils and national authorities concerned forced displacements and deportations. Descriptions of these types of operations found in the archives of local press are reproduced, among others, by the current author in a text on the impact of substandard housing on the deepening and reinforcing of social inequalities (Czarnota, Iwański, 2017).

What makes the situation worse is that the postponing of public debate on systemic solutions which would encompass inclusive policy aimed for this very poor community has been the norm for years. However, authorities on the national level knew about Romanian Roma migration to Poland already in the 1990s, proof of which are the first deportations organised by the Polish state.

[1] The same concerns, for example, Polish people living and working abroad – “That Pole who begs on the street is not the same Pole as I am”.

No access to education and extremely poor, substandard housing conditions in Romania force successive generations to emigrate. At the same time, illiteracy significantly impairs their independence and ability to receive humane work in the countries to which Roma emigrate. As a result of systemic exclusion and segregation, Romanian Roma, in my view, occupy the lowest position in the social ladder, and secondly, are one of the groups with the worst economic situation in Poland. They constitute one of the most striking examples of the fact that the Polish migration policy is not constructed in a way allowing for acceptance of groups of migrants who do not meet economic criteria related to, for example, having a sufficient economic status, education and relevant skills which would potentially help fuel the Polish labour market. It is evident in the fact that there is already a third generation of Romanian Roma living in Poland as an isolated and virtually invisible minority.

The support of activists allowed the registration of stay for some of them, and, so far in single cases, acquiring access to the labour market and education in 2015.

The need for studies, and most importantly for participatory activities with Roma, is very high because in Poland this community is the most excluded from administering and decision-making over their own life on multiple levels. Participatory research combined with appropriately critical reflection constitute ground for cooperation is needed.

Research methodology

In my research work, constructing knowledge usable only in the debates of a rather hermetic academic circle is not the priority. Similarly to Bertie Russell (2015) or Jeffrey Juris (2007), I treat sociological research in this case as an emancipation tool, at the same time questioning the paramount role of university as, in some cases, limited by hierarchic structures and thus limited in terms of possibilities of using research results in social practice. I believe that the researcher's engagement has a positive impact on the research quality, since an engaged researcher has the ability to obtain more detailed information, acquiring knowledge of the wider context of the topics addressed (Choudry, Kapoor, 2013).

More and more researchers use the paradigm of participatory action research methodology (PAR) (such as those financed by the European Commission in the countries of the Global South[2]), which is not to say

[2] Numerous examples can be found on the official website of Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS). Many projects, however, are not subjected to critical evaluation when it comes to the results of their implementation and the range of participation.

that more Roma are included in the process of research creation nor in application of its results. For example, as stated above, communities do not have access to research results and cannot use them in practice. In my study I use militant research as one of the forms of participatory research. At the same time, by using the term of militant research I wish to highlight the fact that I put strong emphasis on the goal of the research and application of its results. In recent years the PAR methodology has become rather common, nonetheless, results are often available only to the academic circle and in reality do not improve the situation of its participants.

Thus I referred to the experience of activists and academics coalitions including Collectivo Situaciones (2003), or the Madrid Observatoria Metropolitana which describe themselves as:

> a militant research group that utilizes investigations and counter-mapping to look into the metropolitan processes of precarious workers, migrants, and militants taking place in Madrid, brought on by crisis, gentrification, speculation and displacement.

Another inspiration were the activities and studies also using the militant research methodology conducted by researchers affiliated with the Social Housing Now and Desire Foundation.[3] As I mentioned before, a group of activists and academics affiliated with these groups (being part of the local tenants' movement), for several years have been working with the community living near Pata Rat on the outskirts of the second largest city in Romania which constitutes a strong academic centre – Cluj Napoca.

Constructing the main principles of my research I was also inspired by the activity of Roma academics affiliated with the Central European University in Budapest and the international network of researchers, MigRom.[4] MigRom is probably the largest research project bringing together researchers working with the subject of Romanian Roma migration to countries of Western Europe. Their foregoing research concerned mainly migration to Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. MigRo also puts emphasis on participation of Roma through, among other means, participation in research processes, distribution of research results, and supporting Roma as experts on their own communities. Nevertheless, scientists centred around MigRom approach the issue of the migration of Roma of Romanian origin to Poland as too marginal and concluded that there is no possibility of obtaining reliable data.[5]

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[3] http://www.desire-ro.eu

[4] MigRom is the acronym of the research project: The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies 2013–2017 (MigRom, 2017).

[5] Despite significantly lower level of migration compared to other countries, I believe that research concerning reasons for migration to Poland and the situation in Poland is very important, while stories of individual families show that migration is embedded in the history of around three generations of Roma, mainly those residing in the Sibiu area and smaller villages

The militant research with Romanian Roma community in Poland

The research on the Roma community, coordinated by the current author and realised by the Western Centre for Social and Economic Research (Marcinkowski, 2015), constituted the first sociological research in Poland which was an attempt to analyse the situation of Romanian Roma on a country-wide scale.

The research took several months, commencing in the spring of 2015 in Poznań, followed by visits to encampments in Wrocław and Gdańsk. During the field study, we conducted 62 questionnaire interviews and 18 in-depth interviews concerning mainly the social and economic situation of Roma who came to Poland from Romania. This way, we obtained information on the legal status of 226 people, including 122 children. The Roma talked about their reason for migrating from Romania to Poland. The data collected during the interviews were partially subjected to quantitative analysis, whereas the in-depth interviews to a qualitative one. Additionally, conclusions were also a result of discussion with the Roma. Some of them served functions similar to evaluations. In order to carry out the research we reached Roma encampments located, among others, in Gdańsk, Kraków, Słomniki, Wrocław, Poznań. On the estates studied, at the time a total number of around 500 people lived on them. However, we expect that the Roma studied by us represent a wider group of immigrants whose size we did not manage to determine. Additionally, a film was realised in which Roma talk about work, education, healthcare, reasons behind their arrival, and forms of discrimination they face, as well as their dreams in regards to staying in Poland.

The data was collected on the basis of the snowball method[6] – residents of subsequent settlements informed us of spaces inhabited by larger groups of immigrants. Of course, it can be debated whether the study is representative. We reached only the most populous encampments. Many individual families live in very dispersed spaces. Interviews were conducted in Polish and Romanian, one in English. Not everyone wanted to participate in the study. Declared reasons for the refusal were concerns regarding potential further use of the results by third parties, forwarding personally identifiable information to border authorities, and fear of deportation or incurring potential consequences related to the illegal

within the region of Transylvania. As already mentioned, I have not found similar research concerning the situation of Roma of Romanian origin.

[6] Snowball sampling – a method of non-arbitrary selection of sample based on recruiting participants of study through other participants.

construction of settlements, etc. The Roma respondents were more likely to agree to a questionnaire interview rather than a video one. After conducting the questionnaire interviews, respondents selected persons who would participate in video recordings. Those who agreed to be video-recorded were people who spoke fairly fluent Polish and had the support of most of the community (mostly males). In each case, these were the people who had also filled in the questionnaires. We visited each of the encampments several times (the most in Poznań). After editing the footage, the material was subjected to discussion during the meetings with communities in Gdańsk, Wrocław and Poznań. Those people agreed to its final form. The Roma did not want the material to be shared online but only during closed meetings and debates on their situation in Poland. Photographic documentation was also made – at least 10 photographs from each of the encampments. During the realisation of the study, documentation served not only an empirical purpose, but also a formal-legal one. The photographic materials constitute for Roma a valuable evidence in cases of forced displacement.

During the project realisation, the research team was informed of an illegal eviction of one of the Wrocław encampments. Due to that fact, one stage of the study had a strictly interventionist character (action research). As a reaction to the demolishing of the encampment located on Paprotna street in Wrocław, we arrived on site in order to receive an explanation from the local policy-makers and to obtain more information on the evicted Roma. Partner organisations and the Western Centre for Social and Economic Research Foundation, in the meeting with the community made a joint decision on the necessity to further publicise the problem of displacement and take up interventionist operations.

The next day, with the help of Dawid Krawczyk, a journalist from the Wrocław division of Krytyka Polityczna, we recorded video interviews with the representatives of national and regional institutions which were the parties involved in the judicial process concerning the eviction of the Roma encampment: The District Building Inspector, a spokeswoman for the Wrocław City Council and the director of the Municipal Centre for Social Aid, the director of Animal Shelter in Wrocław, and the representative of the Nomada Foundation. Thanks to the intervention and the use of the video interviews, the research team found that despite there being an inter-sectoral group for the issues of Roma migrants in Wrocław,[7] which was appointed at the Province Office, no one of these involved was informed about the eviction. Upon the request of the Wrocław municipal authorities, workers of the shelter were to assist in the demolition to prevent people carrying out the

[7] Wrocław is the only city in Poland to have such a formal body. The purpose of the group was to improve the situation of Roma and to develop an agreement on the issue of inhabited encampment area belonging to the Wrocław municipality.

procedure from being bitten by dogs. The film documents both statements of the victims, as well as those responsible for the displacement.[8] The film was recorded five days after the demolition, contributing to the determination of basic information concerning the eviction process. As a consequence of these events, the Roma (with the help of activists from Nomada) later lodged a complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal in Strasbourg stating the breach of four articles of the Human Rights Convention.

Results of the research

Improvement of the life conditions in the community (which gives the temporary protection against eviction without trial), are first steps to citizenship and raising of voices which are connected with the longer-term process of accessing basic rights – access to healthcare, education system and the job market. Those are only first steps in all processes of recovering the impact on life. The main goal was to create possibilities for those who want to attend school or have access to job market and healthcare system. It is really important also to show the reasons of refusal to start a school education which are related to: parents' permission to the absence (parents do not believe that education would change anything); lack of stability of housing conditions (frequent relocations); no possibility to sufficiently prepare for school such as rest, washing of clothes, appropriate conditions for learning and doing homework (no electricity). Whereas some children (and their parents) who want to take up education, cannot do so due to the limited number of places – there is only one school in Poznań which has educational assistants and appropriate preparation for them.

Enhancement of the first steps into citizenship

Prior to the activist operations, the Roma (at least in Poznań) would generally not register their stay and in practice they had no possibility of exercising social and labour rights, nor rights to education and housing. The main factor preventing the registration was the lack of a bank account (together with a sufficient sum of money proving that in future they would not become the social aid beneficiaries), insurance, and knowledge of the procedures. On a local level, even publicising the situation itself and showing it from the Roma perspective enabled the commencement of

[8] The film entitled: *Wrocław Europejska Stolica Wysiedleń [Wrocław: The European Capital of Evictions]*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvLaXXr0jpY (accessed: 16.06.2017).

a range of activities in the cooperation with the community by other groups (mainly workshops with children and interventionist help). Of course, the methods of cooperation can be subjected to criticism. Nevertheless, the work required includes that on an interventionist level, as well as that on the political platform (leading to the change of the situation and empowerment of the whole community). The language barrier, illiteracy, or unfamiliarity with the procedures pose obstacles during the registration process as the registration system is not adjusted to the needs of the disadvantaged and migrants of a low economic status who have major difficulties in accessing it. The applicant must meet the criterion of having a bank account with a certain amount of money, or provide a proof of permanent employment (work contract) which are supposed to prove that they will not claim social benefits, otherwise the registration is not possible. Moreover, there is no help offered for foreign nationals or illiterate people in filling out the forms.

The main goal when it comes to women is providing health insurance (they care for children, illiteracy in their case is more frequent than in men, especially the elderly). The Roma who are illiterate cannot take advantage of qualification-enhancement courses (the Roma declared willingness to participate in driving, forklift, and building courses, among others). Additionally Polish language course would have to go hand in hand with providing housing or financial aid. After many years of turning the other way from the problem and claiming that Roma do not want help, hence they do not receive it, continued insistence and pressure prompted MOPR[9] to delegate two social workers to work with the inhabitants of the encampment. The registered individuals received access to additional benefits, the two social workers took on most of the responsibilities related to interventionist operations (support in access to doctors, filling in of documents, organisation of initiatives related to cleaning the encampment, and registration at the regional Job Centre[10]). The problem lies in the lack of interpreter for daily works, no possibility of organising more frequent meetings with the whole community in a way which would enable undertaking operations with the participation of the Roma, raising the Romanian Roma's voice in public discourse in Poland. The study results, compiled in the brochure form, avoided exclusionary and academic jargon and were presented during meetings in several cities. Criteria for the selection of cities were related to the presence of encampments and activity of Roma community. Presentation of the research report was aimed at including Roma in public debate. On each meeting, apart from survey results, the film with recorded interviews with Roma people was presented. The film facilitated the overcoming of language barrier (most of the Roma

[9] Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Rodzinie (Municipal Centre for Family Assistance).
[10] Polish original name of the institution is Urząd Pracy (UP).

do not speak fluent Polish, especially when plunged into a direct contact or in front of a wider audience). Representatives of Roma community taking part in the meeting also took the floor answering question. At their disposal there was an interpreter of the Romany language.

The presentation of reports in a public space, as well as cooperation with media were significant elements of the process of changing the discourse on Roma. It allowed for revealing the reasons for occupying disused buildings, street-begging, etc. To enable continuity of the public debate, the last of the four presentations took place with the participation of the Ombudsman. During the presentation of the report, the Ombudsman was asked to take a stance on the topic of Roma. After several months from the conclusion of the project, the Ombudsman Office organised a seminar on the situation of Romanian Roma in Poland, inviting activists, representatives of regional governments (Poznań, Wrocław and Gdańsk), and the Roma living in the encampment. As a result of this meeting a study visit was organised. Finally, the representatives of local government in Poznań, the regional Job Centre, Education Department, the Department for Foreigners, the Wielkopolska Province Office and NGOs, activists and the Roma meet every 3 months to jointly agree on further stages of the cooperation process, at the same time striving to maintain the subjectivity and decisions-making possibilities of the Roma. Of course meetings will not change anything (it is often used as a discursive strategy of the state, how to put social resistance within safe frames) but it is only a tool which can be used by community and activist-researchers as a form of pressure and highlighting demands. (It is maybe hardly worth mentioning that we will probably need later to fight for implementation of the agreement). Thanks to these type of activities, it was possible for the city of Poznań to open a debate on the development of systemic changes in regards to formal-legal barriers, but also those deriving from the generational exclusion of Roma. This creates a higher probability that the Roma issue will be included in the migration and social policy of the city, and not merely delegated to NGOs on an ad hoc basis, at least in the capital of the Wielkopolska Province. As a result of interventions on the country-wide level, a debate with the participation of the Polish government's representatives was launched, which directly translates into local operations, and (at least in Poznań) limitation of the possibility of conducting a sudden eviction of the encampment, deportation of its inhabitants or other activities harming the Roma. Activities undertaken by local authorities are still monitored by activists who take part in debates and continue to work on the subject of possible future systemic changes. At the same time, the activists' aim is not to serve the role of independent social workers but to pass on these responsibilities to institutions which theoretically should undertake interventionist operations – e.g. the Municipal Centre for Family/Social Assistance. This has been partially successful due

to jointly developed methods and political pressure. Activists affiliated with the socio-political movement are not restricted by any financing source, nor by any NGO structure, and thus can continue to intervene in case of racist behaviours of officials, or attacks on encampments. Protests are still organised when necessary.

Barriers experienced by the researchers in participatory practice with the Romanian Roma

Socio-cultural difference between members of the community and activist-researchers

The vast majority of barriers in such work are those resulting from differences between members of this community and activists/researchers. These differences derive from experiences, class position, as well as stereotypes of a racist nature. We encounter this also in the case of some others activists, campaigners and employees of non-governmental organisations, who with their operations de facto essentialise and racialise Roma ascribing to them (as a whole group) certain negative characteristics. Wanting to "help" Roma, and to implement aid programmes on the principles which are inadequate to the situation but meet the expectation of the donors is something completely different than starting to cooperate with the minority and learn about differences between community and "donors". It happens that projects conducted in the encampments by the other individuals or NGOs result in the emergence of frameworks which de facto do not take into account the Roma's independence, but reflect the rules pre-established by the project-conceivers themselves. The Roma often do not understand the principles and the exact course of such programmes as long as they are not involved in the process of their creation and their daily reality and history is completely different from "ours". A huge obstacle is also the "language barrier" which has a broader class and historical context of segregation in the education system. All the more so since some of the respondents are illiterate and cannot fluently communicate in Polish (in the case of working on a report they could not read it or introduce changes by themselves). It is not unusual that even those born in Poland who have lived here for years cannot use abstract terms of the Polish language and do not understand the bureaucratic language. It is, therefore, necessary to provide an interpreter during discussions (preferably of Romany language), trainings, or debates with policy-makers. Otherwise, we could witness "exoticisation" of the presence of the Roma (they are there, participating in official meetings, but understanding little).

It could be assumed that launching support for the Roma can also cause inward tendencies within the group (a need to rely on "one's folk", because the help from the outside is partial and uncertain) and – importantly – outwards tendencies (e.g. those who know the Polish language better gain more and do not necessarily share this with other inhabitants of the settlements, thus inequalities emerge).

Another barrier is a help intrusion into the cultural pattern of the community. It covers scenarios in which aid can impose different dynamics within the group, for example by introducing shifts in the traditional roles of men and women (e.g. in cases when women receive relatively more support than men), which can in turn lead to the dissolution of the community. Such situations occurred when women received work as interpreters at schools – their husbands felt that their social status, previously being the breadwinner, is now lower.

Institutional barriers in the course of research

Participatory and emancipatory research often demands cooperation or sometimes struggles between activist-researchers and public institutions. Cooperation between the Roma, us and the staff of the Job Centre in Poznań is a good example of such potential barriers. The Roma together with activists postulated the ability to register at the Job Centre, which would enable them to receive health insurance. City officials in Poznań have for years claimed that such registration is impossible from the legal viewpoint. Only following first visits to, and then debates at, the City Council and legal consultations, certain pathways of operations have been developed which enable registration. After several weeks, the Job Centre in Poznań organised separate meetings in order to streamline the Roma registration which significantly accelerated the procedure. Later however, some of the people would miss further dates of scheduled appointments. They would feel frustrated and discouraged by the fact that they cannot even read the job offer, sign a document or understand what the Job Centre employee is saying. Others did not want to accept a three-shift pattern of work for the money on the lowest wage, which arouse disgust (e.g. men are reluctant to leave families alone at night, for security reasons).

Conclusions

Traditional occupations, so heavily ethnicised and exoticised by ethnographers and anthropologists who sometimes postulate enabling Roma to perform them again (these include pottery, pan-making, horseshoe

forging) since they supposedly “do it best and are born for it”, in a matter of fact resulted from a very low socio-economical position of Roma. Quite often, these anthropologists, sociologists or social activists do not pose the question of why Roma did not perform other occupations of a higher social prestige? At the same time, even today they present them as exhibiting the willingness to a vagabond lifestyle, which, as is known, had always been a certain form of adaptation to the oppressive policy and economic situation. The inaccessibility of the community, settling in groups, selecting squatting places in Poland which are not clearly visible and easily accessible, also does not derive from the will for social isolation (a choice), but, first and foremost, is dictated by ensuring basic personal safety.[11] Every child born in the Roma settlement has far lesser chances for access to basic rights, including education. The phenomenon of “romaphobia” (although not described as often as anti-Semitism or, currently, islamophobia) has been experienced by Roma for centuries, justifying the racist policy and segregation within the city space (mass displacements, deportations).[12]

Attempting self-criticism of the effectiveness of operation with the Roma in Poznań, it could be said that in this case the principle of “militant research” itself (as participatory studies which also serve as a tool of social change) has not contributed to the improvement of life conditions and the situation of all of the encampments’ inhabitants from the systemic perspective. Developing a form of resistance to racist practices or institutional barriers on such as scale as in the case of workers’ unions or tenants’ groups operating in Poznań is impossible due to the many years of long-lasting systemic segregation and political, economic and social exclusion of Roma. As researchers who are applying participatory methodology we should more focus on the discussion of how can we implement results of our research and for what purposes we are conducting them (only for academia or also for social change?). It is worth to mention that the first step is to understand the privileged position of academia and researchers.It could be said that, initially, the activist-research operations – protection of the settlements against raids of a racist nature, blocking evictions, publicising conflicts, demanding the presence of Roma during talks in the City Council and in media, postulating changes in the registration system – with time have transformed into operations aimed at coordination and monitoring

[11] In smaller towns, individual Roma families occupy disused buildings located, for example, near roads leading to villages or smaller towns. These buildings provide better conditions, but it is also related to the avoidance of threat from the residents (most of whom know each other) or radically right-wing groups.

[12] A good example of segregation within the urban space is the fact that many encampments in Romania were created not as a result of Roma choosing to settle in a certain area, but as a result of displacements caused by evictions. Decisions to locate encampments near polluted areas, in the proximity of landfills, are made by authorities.

of official and administrative proceedings (registration at the Job Centre, etc.). Operations on the improvement of Roma's life conditions require many years of work, access to specific resources and systemic changes. Those systemic changes should be defined and worked into the process of cooperation of two different groups (community and activist-researchers).

The borders of existing systemic principles are closed increasingly tight for Roma (and other immigrant groups), and the resentment fuelled by national egoism justifies even the physical acts of aggression. Consequently, the work should take place on the humanitarian and reformist level, as well as on the political one (so far initiated by activists together with the Roma). The practice of building struggle structures is necessary: the organisation of demonstrations, coalitions of different entities and direct operations[13] which enable Roma, at least partially, to have greater possibilities of impacting their situation through the construction of pressure aimed at social changes.

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[13] However, even this is problematic because in the case of Roma it is much more difficult to mobilise the society to come out on the streets in support of this community (as opposed to, for example, tenants' issues) due to the fact that in times of crisis migrants are often blamed for "stealing jobs", benefiting from "dirty" untaxed money and preying on society by, for example, begging.

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Ethnopsychological Consultation: a Tool for Strengthening of Partnerships in Multicultural Social Work

Abstract

During international migration immigrants and refugees are exposed to difficulties that can lead to various psychosocial problems. In order to guarantee appropriate support, social workers are required to investigate and comprehend these clients' psychological and socio-anthropological background, especially when they are not socialized into Western culture. In multicultural social work, the international debate on how best to reach this objective has developed several theoretical perspectives. Against such a backdrop, this chapter investigates ethnopsychological consultation as a professional tool that can be used by social workers, educators and health care professionals.

A case study using participant observation in Italy serves as the basis for the discussion on how this technique puts the theoretical principles of multicultural social work into practice, highlighting how it helps professionals establish stronger partnerships with their clients.

Introduction: the multiple dimensions of immigration

People migrate for a myriad of reasons. "Refugees" are forced to flee from their countries of origin due to their fear of being persecuted for their race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group or their political affiliations. When these people arrive in a new country they are sometimes unable or unwilling (because of their fear) to avail themselves

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of the protective measures offered by the new country (UNHCR, 1951). “Migrants”, on the other hand:

> choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants face no such impediment to return. If they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their government (Edwards, 2016).

Legal, psychological, and social implications make it problematic to merge these two groups – the refugees and the migrants – into a single category. However, regardless of the specific reasons motivating each person to move, both groups undergo some extent of trauma, which can be defined as “a deeply distressing or disturbing event or series of events [...] that influences the degree to which new arrivals are able to adjust and integrate into a new society” (Allweiss, Hilado, 2017: 88). Rose Perez-Foster (2005) emphasizes that:

> the risk of experiencing some kind of trauma can occur at multiple points along the journey. The initial events leading to migration (e.g., war or poverty), events that occur during migration (e.g., rape, theft, exploitation, or hunger), issues with obtaining legal status (such as asylum) and associated stress after entering a country, and the struggles of surviving as a new immigrant because of xenophobia, limited employment opportunities, and poor living conditions can all be experienced as traumatic events (Allweiss, Hilado, 2017: 88).

The consequences of traumatic events can lead to long-term health problems that have been well-documented (Cunningham, Cunningham, 1997; Piwowarczyk, 2007). More specifically, recent research shows that immigrants and refugees are more likely than the general population to experience poor mental health symptoms (Porter, Haslam, 2005).

In order to support the adjustment and the integration of these groups into a new society, it is important to take into account that the culture to which they have been socialized plays a fundamental role (George, 2012) both in the process by which the psychosocial difficulties are perceived and in the paths of access to social and mental health services. Hence, practitioners have to develop an integrative framework, which is able to comprehend the “needs of ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse individuals and communities” (Hilado, Lundy, 2017: 136).

After summarizing the main theoretical perspectives (the ecological systems perspective, the strengths perspective, the social justice perspective, the critical perspective, the intersectionality perspective) that characterize multicultural social work and the professional attitudes (cultural humility, critical counsciousness, collaborative accompaniment) that reinforce cultural competence, this chapter will investigate the methodology of ethnopsychological consultation (EC) as a solution that practitioners can use when addressing individuals who have experienced trauma. The aim is

to highlight how this methodology helps better understand the psychosocial difficulties of immigrants and refugees and enable practitioners to build stronger partnerships with them.

The first section of this chapter synthesizes the framework of multicultural social work practice, emphasizing both the main theoretical perspectives and prevailing professional attitudes. The second section describes the methodological foundations of EC. The third section covers the results of the participant observation of ethnopsychological consultations with immigrants and refugees in Italy. Particular attention is given to the processes that facilitate a more effective comprehension of clients and a stronger collaboration with them. The conclusion includes a summary of how EC accomplishes both theoretical principles and professional attitudes towards multicultural social work practices, providing operators with an additional tool to review their traditional methodological references while simultaneously enhancing their cultural skills.

The practice of multicultural social work

Multicultural social work practice is defined by Derald Sue, Mikal Rasheed, and Janice Rasheed (2016: 79):

> as both a helping role and a process that uses modalities and defines goals consistent with life experiences and cultural values of clients; recognized client identities as including individual, group, and universal dimensions of existence; advocates the use of universal and culture-specific strategies and roles in the healing process; and balances individualism and collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of – and problem solving with – clients and clients systems.

Multicultural social work is guided by different key-concepts, which refer to a wide range of theoretical perspectives: the ecological, the strengths, the social justice, the critical and the intersectional.

The ecological perspective focuses on the adaptive (or maladaptive) transactions that individuals and families have within the biological, psychological, social and cultural environment. Individual and family problems are not considered to be pathological, but as a response to a lack of resources or as a result of interrupted growth due to the lack of resources. Interventions work through the mutual support that can be developed within the natural systems (family, community, cultural networks) of the clients' ecological space (ibidem: 32).

The strengths perspective emphasizes the shift of focus from the pathology of the individuals seeking help to the way they use their resources and assets. Attention is given to the clients' basic dignity and resilience, thereby relativizing the negative stereotypes that label them as

weak, needy or incapable. Through the use of the strengths perspective, a more empowering counternarrative of cultural and personal aspects arises, as well as how people are able to make use of group competencies (ibidem: 35).

The social justice perspective is closely related to the ethical mandate of the social work profession, which requires practitioners to "meet basic human needs and other forms of social injustice - especially directed toward those who are vulnerable and oppressed" (ibidem: 35). This perspective is important, as it requires social workers to recognize and strive to end various forms of discrimination and social injustice often embedded in social interventions.

The critical perspective includes a wide array of theoretical concepts, which mostly refer to postmodern theory, social constructionism, narrative theory, critical social science, conflict theory, critical race theory, antiracist and anti-oppressive theory. Social constructionism shows how the meaning of social problems is a social construct, which has developed through processes profoundly influenced by dominant ideologies. These ideologies act as organizing principles for a particular social order (ibidem: 37). Thus, the clients' experiences, social relationships and problems are shaped by social, economic and political systems. The challenge is to dismantle the main power asymmetries, such as white supremacy, patriarchy and class elitism so that a dialogical relationship can be built where clients' specific psychological and sociocultural resources are understood.

The intersectionality perspective emphasizes the complex lived experiences of human beings (ibidem: 43). Individuals belong to many social worlds and affiliate with multiple groups of social reference (based on culture, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.). Some group identities can lead to situations of oppression, marginalization, alienation, as well as privilege and power. Hence, carrying out their interventions, social workers have to recognize the fluidity of clients' social identities, taking into account both the weaknesses and their access to resources in their daily lives.

Beyond their specific objectives, every theory cited above maintains culture – that of the social worker, the client and the social setting in which EC is carried out – as one of the key variables in building an effective and comprehensive aide relationship. Developing *cultural competence* is, therefore, a central goal for any professional who works with diverse populations. The strategy used in reaching this aim has changed over the last few years. In fact, it is not a matter of merely accumulating information about the specificities of clients' societies, but of developing an open-minded attitude willing to constantly learn and review the practitioner's own conceptual systems of reference (Johnson, Munch, 2009).

Writing from this point of view, many authors emphasize the importance of three professional attitudes. The first is *cultural humility* (Horevitz et al., 2013), that Lundy and Hilado (2017: 495) define as:

> an approach to practice wherein the professional comes from a place of unknowing and curiosity about culture. There are no preconceived judgments but instead a collaborative process with the client (individual, family, community) as a teacher in understanding the meaning of culture in her/his life and how to integrate that into meaningful work that will bring a person to her/his full potential. Cultural humility does not mean there is no knowledge or understanding of culture. Instead, it is recognizing that culture manifests and influences in varied ways and learning those unique facets of a person at each encounter.

The second attitude, closely correlated with the first, is that of *critical consciousness*. This attitude can be defined as the capacity for deep self-reflection and in-depth understanding of the various obstacles that prevent the full understanding of clients' needs. These obstacles can be external (related to social values, stereotypes, asymmetries of power, violations of human and/or civil rights) or internal (based on personal beliefs, biases and attitudes, which are adopted during the communicative processes of daily life). As Marta Lundy and Aimee Hilado point out (2017: 503), critical consciousness requires not only becoming more aware of these obstacles but also accomplishing concrete actions that can change the clients' situations. "It will allow professionals to critically challenge power dynamics in the provider-user relationship" and "to look at ways of creating systematic change that can impact larger swaths of society" (ibidem: 503).

The theoretical guidelines and the professional attitudes described here translate then into the third attitude of *collaborative accompaniment*. Collaboration is one of the pillars of social work skills not only among practitioners themselves but in their relationships with clients. Their "accompaniment" can be defined as "a healing partnership that emerges through the mutual recognition of the inherent human dignity between a helping person and those who suffer" (Lundy, Hilado, 2017: 506). This attitude aims to "establish a purposeful, empathic, egalitarian, and respectful relationship" which aims to support the adjustment and adaptation of clients' in the host environment (ibidem: 506).

The ethnopsychological consultation (EC)

Against the backdrop of these theoretical perspectives and professional attitudes, the ethnopsychological consultation can be considered a methodological tool able to enrich the multicultural social work methodology for immigrants and refugees.

EC is a particular type of psychological consultation (Kirmayer et al., 2015) aiming to support the problem presented by a person of non-Western culture adopting a complementary method that requires reference to both psychoanalysis and socio-anthropology (Devereux, 1970); the former to understand the emotional processes of the individual and the latter to decode the symbolic and normative references that emerge from the discourse with the client (Moro et al., 2004: 14). Tobie Nathan (1986) translated this principle into innovative strategies of therapeutic intervention, deepening how cultural representations of sickness, which he named "traditional etiologies", were elaborated by people in their personal life, combining a plurality of social references on the basis of highly individualized logics. The aim was not only to help clients to explain suffering but to activate the construction of positive change, mobilizing social and symbolic resources linked to their cultural background (Sturm et al., 2011: 207). As the debate on participatory social work stresses, this approach provides an important basis for collaboration between clients and welfare organizations because practitioners are not seen as the only experts who are able to define goals and tools of the helping relationship. On the contrary, practitioners actively involve clients in co-defining the problem or the need, understanding the situation and deciding the plan of action to be taken (Levin, Weiss-Gal, 2009; Warren, 2007: 6).

This method follows different operating rules. As Moro and Real (Moro et al., 2004: 109) observe, the relationship with immigrants and refugees is sometimes ineffective when it is established according to the communicative rules typical of western institutions: a conversational exchange, where not only the methodology of conducting the interview, but also the setting (the desk separating the speakers, for example) or the clothing of the operators (for example, the uniforms in health institutions) emphasize even from a formal point-of-view the distance and asymmetry of the status role among those who seek assistance and those instead who have the competence and instruments to help. In many non-western societies, these relationships necessitate: the mediation of a third-party: a therapeutic group, the community, members of the family, the neighborhood. The presence of the third party is a guarantor of the relationship between patient and therapist: the latter is often, in fact, conceived of as a powerful figure; that can heal or manipulate others at will. Therefore, going to a consultation accompanied by a close relative is commonplace as the presence of a family member is reassuring. This methodological choice not only helps practitioners build a more egalitarian and reciprocal relationship, but promotes a more effective involvement of carers' network in the psychosocial interventions (Adams, 2008: 29).

Care given in a group setting is also consistent with many etiological theories of discomfort and sickness. In many cultures, the whole community is involved in the problem of the individual since it is presupposed that the

affected person is not the real target: it is held, in other terms, that the agent of the evil, sometimes conceived of as a metaphysical entity, can attack the weakest members under other aims. Collective research is considered necessary, therefore, in order to get a better sense of what is really happening to the individual. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the identity for many societies is inextricably linked to the group to which a person belongs. An individual's problem disrupts the entirety of the group, as it no longer can be thought of as a whole if a dysfunction befalls one of its members. An individual problem is, therefore, a collective problem and the involvement of primary networks is at the same time a prerequisite and an instrument of intervention.

Shifting the focus on professionals, EC is carried out by many co-therapists of different languages, cultures and education levels. The team may also include other figures with medical, socio-educational, and social welfare knowledge, such as social workers, who are available to put into practice a collaborative professional approach (Quinney, 2006). A common characteristic of the co-therapists is that all have studied socio-anthropology.

EC is conducted by the primary therapist: he or she has a psychoanalytical background and coordinates the interventions with the aim of enabling everyone to express themselves. The objective of the leader is to ensure that various contributions can help the individual to co-construct his or her own experiences. EC begins with every person speaking according to a predetermined order. After the introduction of all of the participants, space is given to the narration of the client. Subsequently, it is the group to be invited to propose its thoughts on the situation. Sometimes traditional etiologies are immediately advanced: "my daughter is haunted", "they cast a spell on me and I could not have children". The primary therapist tries to find out what the family thinks or what the family back in the country of origin would think of the disorder in question. This allows for the evaluation of existing family ties with the country of origin and the understanding of the symptoms as they are encoded and referenced within the original culture.

Another methodological junction concerns the therapist's attention to the etiological theories related to the context of origin. In line with ethnopsychiatry (Devereux, 1970), they assume the function of a "therapeutic lever": they facilitate the conversational exchange in order to help the people to reconstruct their stories and suffering, according to the symbolic references coherent to the cultural universe to which they belong (Moro et al., 2004: 60).

The relevance of the group dimension should finally be thematized, not only for the client but also for the team of therapists leading the consultation. Nathan cited the need to implement a reflection on the cultural counter-transference or the reactions that every therapist manifests towards cultural

differences (Devereux, 1970). The “otherness” of who comes from another culture can indeed lead to different processes – denial of differences, fascination of the exotic, etc. – induced by a variety of psychological or sociocultural factors (Giordano, 2011; Masocha, 2015). The plurality of viewpoints allows team members to reflect on their approach, so as to implement interventions better oriented to the specific circumstances of the client (Moro, 2008: 192).

EC in practice

Based on participant observation of the consultations performed by the Italian NGO, Metis Africa (2018), an organization active in the city of Verona, the main methodological features of EC will now be broadened in their application with the aim of highlighting how this tool contributes to building more effective partnerships with non-Western clients.

In understanding how EC works, it is important to first consider its setting. EC takes place at a location (for Metis Africa, this is their headquarters in Verona) that does not belong to the local public system of social and health services. This choice reflects the attempt to create a welcoming environment that, through its furniture and care for details, transmits an openness and demonstrates respect for different cultures; sessions are not held in public offices that often seem sterile and impersonal.

A second important element of EC concerns the rules for communication. As aforementioned, the consultation is carried out in a group setting. For a person socialized in Western culture, respect for privacy is key in building the relationship between the client and aide. Therefore, communication with the doctor or any other social or health care practitioners requires a dual exchange relationship. On the contrary, for a non-Western person often what facilitates intimacy is the presence of plural listeners, a wider listening group. This comes from the idea that the community is involved in the addressing and healing of various issues. So being alone while searching for assistance is uncomfortable, or even unacceptable, for some clients. Emblematic is the case of V., a refugee from Nigeria: before narrating her situation, she thanked all the people of the listening group for their availability to participate in the consultation because their presence made her feel “at home” as if she were “in a family”. As reported by the practitioners of the centre where she was being hosted, the presence of the group helped V. to share certain aspects of her story that she had never told before. The group allowed her to overcome her feelings of isolation, thereby permitting her to be more open to new, more effective opportunities for further psycho-relational support.

The third fundamental aspect of EC is the space it gives to the involvement of the group to which a particular client belongs (the family, the ethnic community, the primary networks…), during the communicative exchange. EC is conducted by the primary therapist: he or she has a psychoanalytical background and coordinates the interventions with the aim of enabling everyone to express him or herself. The objective of the primary therapist is to ensure that various attempts at aid can help the individual co-construct his or her own experiences. EC begins with each person speaking according to a predetermined order. After the introduction of all of the participants, space is given to client's narrative. Subsequently, his or her primary group (the family, neighbours, etc.) is invited to give their thoughts on the situation. At this point, the co-therapists can also contribute to the conversation. Hence, during EC, practitioners aim to create a collaborative process in which the client is seen as the true expert of his or her own problem and the entire group has the function of supporting the construction of a complete narrative. Particularly valuable moments occur when the group does not fully understand the significance of the consultant's story. Sometimes this is due to a linguistic problem; sometimes it is because it is difficult to understand the symbolic meaning of the words used; while in other cases, the general sense of the story itself may be unclear. In these situations, a creative process arises through which the group discusses and collaborates with the client to effectively reach a shared view of the problem.

An example of this can be found in the consultation with J., a refugee from Nigeria, who was hosted in a centre for refugees, including other individuals from sub-Saharan Africa. J. is an albino and left his country because he was afraid that he would be used as a human sacrifice, which is not an uncommon end for albinos in that area. At the centre J. displayed an understandable spectrum of emotions: sometimes he cried; sometimes he was very aggressive and sometimes he couldn't control his reactions to various stimuli. During the consultation, J. described a dream in which he was bitten by a dog. Initially, the primary therapist hypothesized that the dog symbolized the most instinctive and aggressive part of J.'s own identity, which suddenly reared up, overwhelming him and hurting him. Other co-therapists, however, did not share this explanation and wondered if there might be other reasons behind this type of dream. In fact, in some cultures, the symbol of the dog is viewed differently: in some places it is just a part of the food chain, in others it is revered. The co-therapists asked J. what the meaning of the dog was in his native culture. J. recounted that the dog was the totemic animal for his family. Following his revelation, significant changes were noted during the second part of his consultation: the tone of his voice was stronger; he assumed better posture and even displayed more bravado in the retelling of the story. He elaborated that the

dog represented protective functions and that certain taboos regarding the animal exist. This case demonstrates how team members collaborated in a creative process that gave various possible interpretations of a cultural symbol through which J. himself could then link the symbolic reference to his native culture and give meaning to his experience. The consultation ended with his commitment to further develop the meaning and practicing of the rituals that celebrate dogs as a totemic animal within his family.

A fourth element of EC serves to help understand the approach to the familial and community – based explanations of a client's illness. This element concerns etiological theories that sometimes come out during group discussions. Examples of this include statements such as: "my daughter is haunted" or "they cast a spell on me and I could not have children". In these traditional etiologies, many explanations refer to the relationship of the individual and the entire group with invisible and metaphysical presences on which many non-Western religions are based. The inclusion of these explanations within the discussion has a crucial function, as they address the problems by introducing a meta-individual symbolic space that raises clients from their condition of loneliness, responsibility, shame and guilt and enables the building of intersubjective solutions that are more consistent with the psycho-social background of all the co-protagonists of the consultation.

A case that exemplifies some of the concepts described in this chapter is that of M., a refugee from Nigeria, who came to Italy by crossing Libya and then the Mediterranean Sea. He had no connection with his family of origin: his mother died, his sister disappeared during her journey to Europe a few years ago and since his father got remarried he has not maintained any relationship with him. M. was very unstable emotionally. At times he was euphoric, while at times he was depressed and unable to concentrate. He did not eat and became thin. He came to the consultation describing his deep sadness and said that if he was not able to find a job he would commit suicide. At an early stage, the consultation reconstructed the map of his family ties and tried to give emotional support. The exchange, however, did not seem to yield significant results. Subsequently, a member of the team asked M. how his community of origin would cure a person who had the same problem. A new phase of the consultation opened in which M. found new energy and motivation and participated more willingly. He described the rites that his village periodically performs to receive the power of the ancestors. The consultation ended in a second appointment where M. shared youtube videos of these rituals while explaining their meaning, "at least for the part that is not secret and can be told to people outside the community", he noted. Therefore, the reference both to the relational ties and the traditional rituals of the community of his origin allowed the group to open a new avenue of expression through which M.'s emotional discomfort

could be addressed using elements from his native context, rendering his experience more comprehensible to his aides. This meant that new possibilities for action and care were finally feasible. Furthermore, EC methodology proves to treat the non-Western individual more respectfully and more appropriately than with previous methods (Parin, 1967; Sow, 1978) based on the interaction with others through two main axes: horizontal (family ties, cohorts, etc.) and vertical (ancestors).

The fifth aspect of EC to highlight is the participatory assessment of the client. In fact, when immigrants and refugees come from non-Western societies, it is necessary to change the traditional evaluation criteria and adopt references more consistent with their cultural background. Through the intersubjective exchange of EC, this change becomes possible.

The case of R., another immigrant from Nigeria, is particularly interesting. During a periodic review of the relationship with her daughter, who was separated from her by the juvenile court, social workers observed how the mother gave attention only to some concrete, physical aspects of the daughter. She noted the dryness of her child's skin and her unkempt hair. At the beginning this behaviour was considered by social workers as an indicator of the inability of the mother to grasp the basic psycho-affective needs of her daughter. The subsequent EC, however, showed that in the culture of the client's origin these practices were rich in symbolic significance and constituted a fundamental communicative medium through which the parental affection, as well as a more complex construction of gender identity would be transmitted. Without the intercultural approach and the space for the communicative expression allowed for with the use of EC, these interpretative elements would not have surfaced and the assessment might have produced outcomes inconsistent with the actual situational dynamics.

A second emblematic case is that of C., an immigrant from the Ivory Coast, who had been undergoing treatment from mental health services. One night she decided to take off her clothes and go out in the rain. Her neighbours called the police, who in turn reported the event to health and social services. During the following EC, her social and cultural references were explored, obtaining useful information to interpret her behaviour not as a psychological imbalance warranting psychiatric or even pharmacological treatment (Abraham, 2010; Barker, 2012), but as a ritual of purification and regeneration enacted during a particularly difficult existential phase in the woman's life, a healing method consistent with a religious and ritualistic practice carried out in her culture for generations. Thus, the complementary approach of EC, which integrated the analysis of her psycho-emotional disturbances, actually unrelated to a mental pathology, with her socio-cultural background allowed for a more comprehensive reconstruction of her situation, mobilizing new existential resources to help her. What appeared to be a malfunction was thus redefined in terms of resilience and

the intervention that followed was no longer provided on an exclusively medical basis but through the emotional and relational support of the informal networks of the woman's everyday life.

Another aspect that is evidenced in both cases reported above is that when practictioners are able to become sensitive to the psychosocial perspective of their clients, the relationship can be much more effective. Conflicting dynamics cease and mutual trust arises. The path to support and better care for the individual is, therefore, secured.

A sixth aspect of EC focuses on the collaborative processes that occur within the team of practitioners. This collaboration takes place first during the mutual exchange of ideas, interpretations and proposals that arise during the consultation and then at the second phase of the process when the client leaves the room and the team reflects on the previous communication exchange. The cross-examination of each contribution allows for inter-subjective supervision that highlights the professionals' psychological projections or other methodological errors that may hinder the full effectiveness of the EC.

This happened, for example, after an EC with A. (a Kurd). A. was an asylum seeker and was hosted at a reception centre near Verona. A. no longer adhered to the initiatives organized by the staff supporting clients, did not sleep at night and became thin. During the consultation, he recounted his thoughts and shared his hopelessness. He longed for his sick mother, whom he left in Mosul during the bombing there. He lamented of the impossibility of reaching Germany, where a friend had guaranteed him a job. A. said that at certain moments he felt like dying. Initially, co-therapists sought only to understand the reasons for his lack of appetite. Then, A. told of his studies in Mosul and his beloved literature and philosophy books that he had needed to sell along the Balkan route for cash. He cited several authors, some well-known in Europe, others known only in the East. At that point, the group changed its attitude. "Fascinated" by the possibility of communicating with a highly educated person, the practitioners began to focus on stimulating his cultural interests as a way to cure his malaise. The group suggested that he visit local libraries, but A. replied that he couldn't because he no longer had the strength in his legs necessary to do so, that he would need someone to accompany him. After the consultation, the team reflected on this moment, stating that the excitement of some staff members to speak with a highly educated person might have completely diverted the consultation in a direction inconsistent with the client's primary needs, risking the psychological and relational support he really required. It must, therefore, be reiterated that although it may be costly, constant intersubjective monitoring allows staff co-therapists to develop a greater awareness of their attitudes towards the clients, the clients' well-being and the methodology with which the psycho-relational support is actually provided.

Conclusion

During their journey, both immigrants and refugees face deeply distressing events that influence their adaptation to a new society, especially when it is characterized by symbolic and cultural references that are very different from their context of origin. In these types of cases, EC reveals itself as particularly useful because it is able to comprehend the client's discomfort in light of his or her social and cultural background (Fernando, 2010; Nathan, 1986).

The reference to the foundations of current multicultural social work (Sue, Rasheed, Rasheed, 2016) enables us to observe how EC puts into practice many theoretical principles and methodological strategies of this approach. Consistent with the ecological perspective, the relational and sociocultural context plays a key role in analyzing the client's psychological problems and in finding an appropriate solution. In line with the strengths perspective, EC relies on the symbolic and relational wealth of such a context. On the basis of the critical perspective and of the social justice perspective, EC also aims to relativize the stereotypes and representations of the culturally diverse people that do not correspond with their true identities, reducing different forms of discrimination. In addition, as the intersectional perspective points out, EC aims to take into account the wider array of factors that affect each situation. However, unlike other approaches, EC is also characterized by operational criteria that translate these theoretical principles into communicative practices typical of non-Western cultures. Furthermore, when using EC, the three professional attitudes that reinforce practitioners' cultural competence, discussed in the first section, come to the fore.

Referring to the first attitude of *cultural humility*, the goal of putting the client at the centre of the group support session requires practitioners to be empathetic. However, empathy needs to be coupled with the willingness to learn new psychological, social and cultural references, even when they diverge from Western habits. If this epistemological shift is not accomplished, the risk of oppressive and discriminatory practices may occur (Dominelli, 2012) despite practitioners' best intentions for doing good work.

As for the second attitude of *critical consciousness*, it is important to stress that when practitioners are able to consider the socio-cultural background and the psychological condition of their non-Western clients, the asymmetries of power and discrimination become more apparent, helping the team to pursue the best possible solutions for their clients, even when it becomes necessary to revise the assessment and evaluation criteria of their own organizations.

Finally, focusing on the third attitude of *collaborative accompaniment*, EC demonstrates that when the basis for a sympathetic relationship is actually guaranteed, conflicting dynamics diminish. This change leads to interventions more consistent with immigrants' and refugees' prerogatives and enables social services to carry out more participatory procedures.

Even if EC can not be properly considered a methodological tool of social work, the inclusion of social workers in the team as co-therapists thus proves to be a useful resource through which meaningful partnerships with non-Western clients can be established, reinforcing the bases for effective and appropriate social services. The aim of activating clients through the recognition of their sociocultural background and their particular expertise, ideas and experience encourages practitioners to avoid paternalistic attitudes that restrict immigrants and refugees in a dependent and passive role. The group setting, moreover, not only helps the team review its own analysis and intervention criteria, but facilitates the implementation of shared assessments and the construction of intersubjective solutions, consistent with the basic principles of participatory approach in social and health services.

Between the recognition of the different knowledges, skills and experiences expressed by non-Western people and the deconstruction of culturally conditioned professional approaches, the EC can therefore be considered a useful tool able to break down the symbolic and communicative barriers that separate social work practitioners and clients and to create new collaborative paths based on mutual trust and effective partnership.

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Difficulties Faced by Researchers in Participatory Practices: An Example of Research with Roma People

Abstract

The number of socially excluded localities and persons residing in them has significantly increased in the Czech Republic over the last ten years. Socially excluded localities have their specific characteristics and environment that very often concern exclusively the Roma localities. The participatory research aims to gain access to the locality followed by the establishment of communication and cooperation with local residents. These relationships, however, show a number of difficulties that in this contribution are reconstructed based on the ethnographic research conducted in a socially excluded locality inhabited by the Roma community. Some partial recommendations have been formulated for accessing the field. These are recommendations relating to the individual characteristics of the researcher, the specific characteristics of the environment and the characteristics of the target group (the Roma community).

Introduction

Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain, Mike Kesby (2010) state that the participatory paradigm becomes one of the leading paradigms in the social and environmental sciences. From a practical point of view, it is possible to say that participatory research is based on the collaboration of a researcher and "a non-academic participant" such as communities, informal groups

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of patients, interest groups, non-governmental organizations, etc. So, it is not the methods but the researchers' attitude that can be considered a key element of participatory research (Cornwall, Jewkes, 1995).

In such understood participatory approach we can encounter a number of difficulties. Within participatory approaches, we can distinguish four categories of limitations (Aldridge, 2015). The first category is represented by the limits resulting from the fact that the researcher enters the research environment as a specialist from the outer environment (Minker, 2000). The second limit is the lack of academic standardization (Walker, Schratz, Egg, 2008), which would be linked to participatory research. The third limit is the high dependency of research findings on the researcher's abilities (Aldridge, Dearden, 2013; Barton, Papen, 2010). And the fourth and last category of limits is the limits concerning the distribution of power in participatory research (see also: Goodson, 2013).

These difficulties can also be in a dynamic interaction with the target group to which the participatory approach is applied (in the case of the presented research on the Romany living in a socially excluded locality). Renata Weinerová (2014) describes that there are manifestations of a lack of concern, cultural superiority, distance, underestimation, or supremacy towards the Roma people by the majority population. In fact, a choice of participatory approach with the Roma people seems to be the best possible solution, since the participatory approach deals with issues of domination, oppression, or alienation (Creswell et al., 2007).

The chapter aims to identify and interpret the difficulties that arise within the dynamic interaction of the participatory approach and the selected target group, the Roma people. In the contribution, we will first address the social exclusion of the Romany in the Czech Republic, then the methodology of the presented research and then directly the difficulties identified in the research. In the framework of discussion and conclusions we will propose recommendations related to the implementation of participatory research in a socially excluded area with the Roma community.

Social exclusion[1] of Roma citizens in the Czech Republic

The contemporary discourse of social exclusion focuses on the social conditions from which exclusion arises, on the processes through which exclusion occurs, and on the situation of such excluded persons. The second level of the contemporary debate on social exclusion is the weakening of social cohesion, and social disintegration, which are conceived as the consequences of social exclusion from society (Mareš,

[1] We refer to general social exclusion; however, the paper focuses on the Roma people, therefore specification of their number is also provided.

Sirovátka, 2008). Thus the concept of social exclusion does not emphasize the individual "failure" of social participants, but also works with structural factors (Růžička, Toušek, 2014).

Social exclusion is strongly associated with ethnicity in the Czech Republic; according to estimates, there are approximately 150–300 thousand (SIRK, 2015) Roma people living in the Czech Republic.[2] At the same time, one third to half of them live in an unfavourable situation, or are socially excluded (i.e. living in socially excluded localities, GCARM/RVZRM, 2017; SIRK, 2015), which is a very high figure, especially provided that social exclusion tends to be passed down from one generation to another, thus deepening the inadequate situation of a household (Skupnik, 2007).

In the Czech Republic, between 2006 (GAC, 2006) and 2015 (GAC, 2015), there has been a large increase in the number of socially excluded localities and the number of people living in them.[3] There has also been a rise in the number of persons living in substandard housing.[4] In 2006, there were 310 socially excluded localities with a population of 60–80 thousand people, especially the Roma people. The data from 2015 indicate an increase in the number of localities to 606 (an increase of 95%) with the number of persons living in them to be 95–115 thousand (an increase of 44%). Social exclusion changes its predominantly urban character, and the localities disintegrate into a larger number of smaller units (the average population of such localities dropped from 271 to 188 persons).

In the case of applying a participatory approach with the Roma people in socially excluded localities, it is necessary to take into account that social exclusion is an element limiting the possibility of participation.[5] The Roma communities are closed to non-Roma/ "strangers" (e.g. Sutherland, 2014), so establishing relationships and cooperation is fairly difficult – there is a distrust of system players (authorities, political sphere – lack of participation in elections); the primary role is focused on securing basic living needs. Precisely for this reason a participatory research was conducted to give a "voice" to those, whose possibility of participation is limited. In accordance with Jo Aldridge (2015), we believe that a participatory approach is a highly desirable in case of disadvantaged, discriminated, excluded, and marginalized groups.

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[2] Government Council for the Affairs of the Roma Minority reports 245 thousand Roma people (GCARM/RVZRM, 2017).

[3] The Roma people are not the only residents of socially excluded localities.

[4] Substandard housing can take different forms – it concerns the technical condition of the building/flat, the size of the floor area per person, short-term contractual relationships, the no housing situation – e.g. temporary stay with relatives.

[5] Social exclusion is understood in this contribution as the exclusion of an individual from the mainstream society, that is, an insufficient participation in different areas of social life (Mareš, 2004).

Research methodology

Research territory

The research territory is one of the socially excluded localities in a city in the Czech Republic. The locality was chosen for its spatial exclusion. The local population formed a closed group and among other localities has a reputation as one of the hardest to live in, due to its location and the technical condition of the properties (GAC, 2006; Kvasnička, 2010).

There are 7 buildings in the locality, each contains 4 housing units. At the time of the researcher's (Marek Mikulec) stay (9/2012 – 10/2014) in the locality, only two properties were not inhabited, one serving as a community centre, and the other in a state of disrepair and walled up for many years. If the researcher doesn't count himself, the lowest amount of people living in one flat was 2, the highest number was 14; altogether approximately 120 people lived in the locality.

Research design

As this socially excluded locality was characterized by specific features distinguishing it from the majority of society the ethnographic approach to research was chosen. Ethnography is a holistic study of socio-cultural contexts, processes and meanings within the cultural system; it is also a flexible and creative process of discovering, making conclusions, and continuing research to obtain empiric validity (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2007). Ethnography can also be called the interaction process of "learning episodes", which has an open end (as opposed to the experiment). An ethnographer enters the field in a position of a learning child, getting to know things through all the levels of his/her being, whether it is through thinking, feeling, or acting. His/her insight is gained by gradual growing into the research environment; a describing observer is turning into a participating observer (DeWalt, DeWalt, 2002; Kawulich, 2005).

All these key characteristics of this approach seemed to be adequate to explore a distinct subculture; the researcher's task is to get to know one of the elements/features of this subculture, specifically the life situation of its residents, in the terms used by the members of the researched community (Loučková, 2010: 239). Typically for ethnographic study only a general research topic was defined and it was expressed in the question on "How do people in a socially excluded locality perceive and interpret their life situation?"

Data collection and analysis

The research data came from participant observations (and written records of the researcher's activities, etc. in the researcher's logbook) during a long-term stay in the locality (September 2012 – September 2014) and then using in-depth interviews with 26 communication partners[6], the residents of a socially excluded site.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The thematic narrative analysis is focused on content and its categorization, but at the same time allows for the discovery of the "new" in the data (Riessman, 2008). The narrative is defined as specific, separate stories that are arranged around the personality who constructs the plot. In these stories, I was able to identify four basic themes (housing, social relationships, employment, finances) that relate to the research questions and encapsulate other themes. The significance of these themes was subsequently validated by participant observations. The identified themes were later saturated with other research data, i.e. participant observations and in-depth interviews. The theory, which must precede the thematic narrative analysis, I gained through my stay in the locality and growing into its structure, in particular through the knowledge of the life stories of my "primary" communication partners (Riessman, 2008).

Research results

As a part of the research, the environment of a socially excluded locality has proved to be very specific and closed (to the outside world). It was an environment that faced oppression from the part of the majority society, but also an environment where certain cultural habits related to the Roma ethnics, such as celebration of holidays, funerals, christenings, etc., persisted. Within the results of the research, it can be accentuated that the oppression due to ethnicity, i.e. belonging to the Roma ethnic group, is the strongest factor of their social exclusion, which could serve as an argument supporting the anti-discrimination approach in social work (Mikulec, 2016).

[6] Out of a total of 26 communication partners, 24 were in the age category from 16 to 50 years old, and 2 were over 50 years old. Minors younger than 15 are also mentioned in the notes of the field log, but no semi-structured interview was completed with them; they were informal or unstructured interviews, on which I subsequently took notes.

Difficulties of participatory practices with Roma people

In order to identify the difficulties described in this contribution its authors used the data that had been collected by one of them in the above described ethnographic research. This time they approached the data with the same method- a thematic narrative analysis; however the focus of the secondary analysis was different. We understood difficulty as a certain annoyance or inconvenience that happened during the research.

We identified the following categories of difficulties: conflict of roles, difficulties concerning a researcher's interventions into everyday activities of community members and difficulties in defining boundaries of a researcher's participation in the community daily routines. The data presented comes from his experience in a socially excluded locality, which was recorded in a logbook. The data are supplemented by direct quotes from the research diary that the researcher kept during his stay in the locality.

Conflict of roles

The role of a researcher in participatory ethnographic research is a dual one: the role of a researcher in the given environment, but also the role outside this research environment, such as the role of a family member or a student. These roles may be in a particular conflict and there is a need of balance between them.

Conflict of roles between a family member and a researcher

The role of a researcher in a socially excluded locality may be linked to concerns from his family.

> The role of a researcher has undergone great changes and I am aware that my stay in the locality was not easy for my parents, nor for my extended family…I had to talk to my parents about the fact that my spending of more time in the locality would become a bit more complex. When I was just about to say that I rented a flat in the area and was going to move there, the evening TV news had just at that moment started to report that two Roma men had attacked someone somewhere ... – so I made a decision to leave the news for the next day. My parents' reaction was fearful and they started discouraging me and pushing to stop the research (A quote from the researcher diary). In meeting of the roles of a family member and a researcher, we can illustrate the meeting of a discourse of the researcher and a discourse of the majority society. This creates a certain tension between the researcher´s positionality in the Roma community and in his family, which at this point represents the opinion of majority society about the danger of staying in a socially excluded area (Mikulec, 2016: 67–68).

The environment of socially excluded localities is in fact a priori perceived by people from outside as dangerous and risky.

> And this was also the way my family members perceived it and started acting "on my own good". However, over time, when I was still doing all right there, and after they met Láďa, a friend of mine, and a key person for my research, the tensions gradually decreased (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 68).

There are many references in scientific literature that ethnographic research places high demands on a researcher (see: Hajdáková, 2013; Pollard, 2009; Soukup, 2014) but the claims made on his family are not mentioned much in the literature. The researcher also describes how he dealt with the demands that the research placed on him. It is a sophisticated management of information handling.

> Apart from that the management of information was implemented too, which wasn't psychologically easy for me. The management of information by the participatory researcher is a tactic implemented in the relationship between him and his family or people who care of him to keep them distanced from the unexpected events in the research process. As I really wanted to have the same authentic conditions in the locality, even those miserable situations, there were a lot of precarious moments, financial problems, hunger, and so on during my stay onsite. I was strongly filtering what I was sharing, telling them only positive news which wasn't easy… For instance, when I was experiencing there situations when I had not eaten for a few days because there was no money – neither my neighbours nor me had enough money to buy food. There was nothing left to bring to a pawnshop. When I phoned my family, I did not share this with them. When I was asked what I had eaten that day, I made something up, even though at that moment my stomach was really growling (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 68).

Conflict of roles between a researcher and a PhD student during the research

The role of a researcher in an ethnographic research is associated with everyday presence in the research environment. If the researcher is a student at the same time, the necessity of daily presence comes into a certain conflict with the necessity to be present at the workplace or at school, i.e. in the environment outside the research environment, both spatially and culturally... The role of a student may have two possible impacts, the first is to keep a certain distance from the research environment.

> The role of PhD student helped me a lot in the research; all the discussions with my consultant and my supervisor, discussions with my colleagues in the office, talks with other colleagues helped me to reflect on the processes in the field and to maintain some detached view and distance. It meant not only expert advice, but also a certain form of mental hygiene and supervision to me (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 69).

Certain operational conflicts associated with the interaction of the role of a student and the inhabitant of the locality represent the second impact.

> The example of a conflictual situation was when I had to leave a lecture earlier, because we (in the community) managed to get some coal, and people in the locality managed to arrange for a car. What was more frequent was that some parties took longer than expected and I needed to be at the faculty the next day (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 69).

Difficulties concerning the researcher intervention into everyday activities of community members

As a part of an ethnographic research, a researcher must cope with a series of difficulties, especially in situations where he/she was deciding whether to intervene in given situations, and how or whether not to interfere with them. The researcher often comes into conflict with the need to choose between his normative expectations and their possibilities in the research environment. An example of decision-making on ethnographic research interventions in a socially excluded locality may be the acceptance of teenagers' smoking.

> Everyday difficulties, for example, included how to approach smoking teenagers. Their parents seemed to know that they were smoking but the teenagers would not smoke in front of them. Was I supposed to let them smoke in my flat when they managed to sneak a cigarette from their parents? Although I disagreed with them smoking at their age (in this case, 13 and 14 years old) (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 81).

The second example may be the researcher´s opinion on skipping classes.

> I kept meeting children in the area who were supposed to be at school. But the longer I stayed in the locality; I learned that this issue had its explanation, whether legitimate or rational. In the case of the girls absences, the reason was that they had to babysit their younger siblings, for example, when the father needed to leave to work in a slag heap and the mother ran errands at the authorities, or when there was no money, school children were rather kept at home, or the parents did not have enough money to purchase school supplies required by the school, etc. In case of some boys from the locality, it was also common that they were taken to a heap to help make some extra money (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 81).

The difficulties that have arisen appear to be the most burning at the time of entering the research environment (Mikulec, 2016).

> This difficulty was felt at the initial stage of the research. The deeper I got immersed into the community the more I understood. Finally it was clear for me I was not there to tell children to go to school, but to understand why they did not go there; or perhaps I could try to get them a little more excited about school by tutoring (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 74).

Another category of difficulties was associated with the poverty that the locals had to cope with every day. Under this situation, the researcher had to choose between his own comfort and the fulfilment of basic living needs of his neighbours.

> A situation when I had my last 200 CZK (approx. 7.3 EUR[7]), knowing I had to make ends meet for several (3–4) days. But when my neighbours knocked on my door telling me that their children were starving, I gave them the money. They asked for a bigger sum when they lacked several thousand crowns to pay for the rent and if they failed to

[7] Based on an exchange rate in Q2 2015: 27.38 CZK = 1 EUR

> do so in full, their lease would be terminated, resulting in eviction. If I had decided not to interfere with the events in the locality, and this was significant intervention, they would most likely not have managed to put the rest of money together, failing to pay the rent and thus faced the termination of their lease. They would have to move out…a family with seven children (A quote from the research diary, Mikulec, 2016: 81–82).

Difficulties in defining boundaries of a researcher participation in the community daily routines

In the context of a research environment a researcher's task is to establish relationships with the locals. They have certain expectations from her/him as from their neighbour. This positionality creates difficulties in defining boundaries between him/her and locals. An example of the above mentioned can be a contact with the police, a situation into which a researcher in a socially excluded location can easily get (Ryška, 2010; Stockölová, Ghosh, 2013). Matoušek (2004: 70) states that: the objective that leads a researcher into a dangerous area sooner or later also leads to contact with the police. Legislation in the Czech Republic, however, does not specify any special modalities for conducting research.

An example of the above mentioned can be the following situation described by the researcher in his researcher's diary (Mikulec, 2016: 82).

I was asked by some local boys who acquired an old Škoda Felicia car but did not have a driver's license, whether I would take them to a slag yard with this car. The rear seats were removed and more than 1.5 tons of slag was loaded in the car. Besides me as a driver, there were three other persons in the car, one sitting in the passenger seat, and the other two sitting on the slag. We were so overloaded that we were scratching the road with the back of the car all the way there. I drove carefully, so we did not expose other road users to any danger. But if we were pulled over by the police, it would probably not have been okay.

Even in an environment seemingly more prone to contact with the police, however, safety and ordinariness prevails. As stated by Matoušek (2004: 74), "in a dangerous area life is still dominated by ordinariness, and safe and common situations prevail."

Discussion and conclusion

Participatory approaches are becoming one of the leading research paradigms, bringing a number of positive aspects to the research, such as "giving voice", increasing trust among research participants and researchers, and empowering of research participants (see e.g. Aldridge, 2015). Within the participatory approach, there are several categories of limitations. The

first one is that a researcher enters the research environment as an expert coming from an external environment (Minker, 2000), the second is the lack of academic standardisation (Walker, Schratz, Egg, 2008), the third is the dependence of research findings on the researcher's abilities (Aldridge, Dearden, 2013; Barton, Papen, 2010) and the fourth is the distribution of power in participatory research (see also: Goodson, 2013).

Within the research, three thematic categories of difficulties were identified, based on the experience of researchers in ethnographic research with Roma people in a socially excluded locality mostly populated by the Roma minority, thus we have fulfilled the defined goal of this chapter. As part of the thematic categorisation of difficulties the following categories emerged: conflict of roles, difficulties concerning the researcher intervention into everyday activities of community members, and difficulties in defining boundaries of researcher participation in the community daily routines.

The difficulties described by us correspond with those described in the literature. The role conflicts described by us are the direct consequence of the role of the expert coming from the external environment; difficulties concerning the researcher intervention into everyday activities of community members and difficulties in defining boundaries of researcher participation in the community's daily routines are a direct consequence of a lack of academic standardization and distribution of power in (relationships in) participatory research. How a researcher copes and deals with the described difficulties is always based on his or her abilities.

All the above mentioned difficulties interact with a specific target research group (the Roma community) and the specific environment of a socially excluded locality (see above). We conclude with implications for the realization of ethnographic research in socially excluded localities. They result from the analysis of the researcher's experience presented in this chapter and are defined with the reference to individual characteristics of a researcher, the characteristics of a research environment as well as the characteristics of a target group (the Roma community).

The individual characteristics of a researcher

A research environment must be entered with reflection upon bias, fears, and an ethnocentric perspective. The Roma people are good observers of non-verbal communication and have a very developed sense of "reading" the personality/mood of their communication partner (Sutherland, 2014). Reflecting upon a researcher's own position in the world under research and insightful reading communication partners' interpretations of the researcher help to make communication between both parties fluent and a research possible.

The specific characteristics of the environment

Every environment in which socialization takes place has its own specifics, which may differ from from the researcher's frame of reference. These includes, for example, social relationships (family, community, informal help networks; customs, traditions, and their transformations), the perception of system players (authorities, police), and the concept of time, housing, work, and finances. The choice of the gatekeeper with high position in such unique and extremely complex community seems to be a good solution in the entering phase of a research.

The characteristics of the target group

It is necessary to reflect that the marginalized status of the Roma people in Czech society has also been paired up with changes related to the system level, which have real impacts on households. These include, for example, changes in family relationships and the formerly traditionally defined roles of men and women. The current Roma household/family is now less cohesive (e.g., the number of single mothers increases); in the context of reducing the number of residents living in a given flat, often stipulated by the lease contracts with local landlords, the Roma family can no longer fulfil the role of a rescue network for its members. The changes also concern traditionally structured and divided male and female roles that, despite their transformation, show persistence in certain rules. The division of male and female roles in the Roma family also has an impact on their cooperation with a researcher. If the researcher is a woman, her primary communication partner in a Roma family is also a woman, and dealing with a man has a clearly defined framework. For example, if a man is at home alone, there should be no "strange" woman present; the same applies to a male researcher, he should not be left alone with a woman in the household.

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Part III

Callenges Encountered in Participatory Research and Practice

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Theory and Practice of Participatory Approach in Schools: an Example of the Future Youth Schools – a Forums Project

Abstract

The active participation of youth has indeed become a key theme across a broad range of service delivery. All organisations concerned with children and young people now promote participation as a "central issue" (Wright, Haydon, Morgan, 2002). Across the EU there is a need to increase educational attainment and active civic participation by European youth. FYS-Forums is responding to this by creating a model for school – led global citizenship youth forums. But even the most carefully planned project can run into unexpected issues. In my contribution a critical review of FYS-FORUM project will be presented.

Introductory notes on FYS – FORUMS educational project

This chapter has been inspired by an educational project: Future Youth School – Forums (FYS-FORUMS),[1] implemented in the years 2015–2018 by five partner organizations from Poland, Lithuania, Italy, Cyprus, and Great Britain[2] within the Erasmus+ programme. Apart from partners from the 5 countries above, the recipients, but also the co-organizers of FYS – FORUMS, were primary and junior high schools (both teachers and students). I was invited to the project as a social pedagogue who has experience with working with youth at risk and is familiar with the

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[2] Project partners: University of Łódź (Poland), OXFAM GB (Great Britain), OXFAM ITALIA (Italy), Jaunimo karjeros centras (Lithuania), Centre for Advancement of Research and Development in Education Technology LTD CARDET (Cyprus).

participatory approach. Within the idea of the project, of especial interest for me was that the main aims of actions were to anticipate pupils drop out and cut off the risk of starting the process of exclusion at its very early stage. The Forum, in my opinion, was a form of prevention tool for the education dropout risk.

The basic aim of the FYS-FORUMS Project was to create a model of schooling that promoted the idea of global citizenship with the use of a youth forum,[3] which was defined as the space within the school for students to express their opinions and present ideas that coincided with the democratic process of making a decision. This event by definition was supposed to be organized by students, including only topics recognised as important by young people. The elements that differentiated this forum from other similar ones organized in various parts of the world were real outcomes of the decisions taken during the forum, important for the school life and students and staff's activity on the local and global level. Based on the survey[4] and many discussions with the project partners, teachers and students, we came to the conclusion that the idea of the forum as a place to express opinions is not satisfying for all the above parties. It should be emphasised that the way we understand democracy and the process of arriving at decisions in accordance with its assumptions, in order to have a chance to have a real impact, it cannot finish at the stage of a discussion. Inseparable parts of this process are also decisions on the direction of the activity and the activity itself – without them (decisions

[3] Youth forums have been established in over 30 schools that agreed to take part in the project. In the first year only 4 educational institutions from 4 countries (Great Britain, Cyprus, Lithuania, and Italy) were involved, in the following years more schools joined in (from the above countries and Poland). In the forum creation and work mainly young people were involved, with minimum encouragement and support from teachers in the first stage of the project. Originally it was assumed that the forum will be an institution working within the school that in the following years will be less and less dependent on teaching staff and become a space for students and shaped by them. During each Forum there were discussed topics important from the point of view of young people and suggested by them. The discussion formed the basis for directing further actions in correspondence with the subject of the discussion held during the event. Entrusting the forum to students was supposed to increase the feeling of agency, civic awareness, involvement in local, regional and global problems, and to develop democratic attitudes.

[4] Before any actions were directed and taken, research was carried out (focused interviews with students and teachers), the object of which was to examine the current situation and expectations of students and teachers in relation to their participation in school life. Of special interest were the relations between school-life of participants, assessment of educational programmes' usefulness in everyday life, teachers' opinions on the educational contents implemented by them, students' knowledge about global citizenship and their involvement in local and regional issues. Thus, the purpose of the subject of particular attention was to facilitate answering the question of how to introduce the model of education based on the rules of democratization and participation to school, where the primary objective is the development of involvement and civic attitudes among students.

connected with actions), the forum would only be “the art for art’s sake”, and the idea behind it would come to an end together with the project. Apart from chances for the forum’s surviving at school, assessed as small, what motivated us to create a forum as a students’ institution with the right to make decisions concerning school activity was related to the intention to equip students with decision-making skills, which could be achieved by authentic observation of their consequences in the life of the school.

Justification for modifying the school space

The incentives to create the institution of the forum were: firstly, perception of the current educational system as inefficient in the scope of developing such skills as communication, organization, and entrepreneurship, which could be useful in future professional and private life. Currently, in the majority of European countries teaching programmes are based on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, not the development of practical skills that can be applied in everyday life (for example UK National Curriculum, 2014). Based on literature review,[5] as well as observations and experiences of people involved in the project, it was confirmed that the current system of education is insufficient where it comes to the development of general/ transversal competences,[6] while knowledge transferred during classes is perceived by students as of little use in both everyday[7] and professional life.[8] The purpose of the forums established within the project was to integrate the knowledge gained in the process of education with practical learning and its application as well as the development of the transversal competences mentioned earlier. Secondly, another incentive was recognising the issues

[5] As part of the research preceding the project implementation, in 5 countries involved in FYS-FORUMS an analysis of official documents regulating the work of the educational sector was carried out.

[6] Competence (according to the European Qualifications Framework 2009) is defined as “proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. Competence is defined in terms of responsibility and autonomy” (Kolanowska, 2010: 321). Among various types of competences (such as for example languages, IT, specialization competences, etc.) we can find cross-sectional competences that are not related to any specific subject or field of studies (ibidem: 322) and which include among others: entrepreneurship, creativity, team work, communicativeness, etc.

[7] It is one of the outcomes of a research carried out before taking the action.

[8] For example in Great Britain, there is a strong demand from businesses to support young people in formal education – “learning by taking part in educational programmes and trainings, leading to the acquisition of a registered qualification, which is a set of learning/ educational outcomes the achievement of which was formally confirmed by authorized institution and was registered in the Integrated Qualifications Register” (see: Think Global, 2013).

of democratization, participation and involvement of youth in local and global issues as important and essential for the development of conscious and active citizens. The project participants noticed in the existing teaching programmes the deficiency of subjects that would promote the idea of democracy and citizenship in an efficient way. As Jonathan Birdwell et al. (2014) note, contemporary youth get involved in civic matters to a limited extent, which can result directly from the approach of the school and teachers to subjects that teach youth citizenship and encourage them to take up social activity. For example, in Poland, as in many European countries, subjects such as Social Studies have a considerably lower status than such subjects as Maths or Physics.

At the beginning, each Forum was preceded by workshops for young people, to help them gain such competences as, for example: speaking in public; leadership skills development; providing students with some information enabling them to actively participate in the discussion; and teaching them effective and critical means of searching for credible sources of information in the future. What is more, young people learned how to prepare such an event on their own, to take total control over its organisation in the future.

Taking into consideration all the above elements of the FYS-FORUMS Project, we decided to support and develop students' civic attitudes based on such priorities as involvement, democratization, participation and empowerment by the creation of youth forums. These highlighted priorities corresponded to the strategy towards young people adopted in the EU as well as the educational practice, where one of the primary objectives is the minimization of the number of students who drop out of schools[9] for various reasons. What is more, the implementation of the FYS-FORUMS project is also the response to the need for young people in European countries to acquire social, civil, communication, or effective learning competences.

The establishing of the institution of youth forums was the objective in itself, but also the means to achieve desirable outcomes. Taking part in the forum also had an additional objective of "teaching" young people to

[9] In Poland in didactic research calculation of the scale of the phenomenon of premature school dropout ESL (Early School Leaving) indicator is applied. J. Madalińska-Michalak writes that "This indicator does not have a fixed name in Poland. In the official translation of the EU documents initially it was called a dropout rate (Konkluzje Rady ds. Edukacji of 12th May, 2009 after: Madalińska-Michalak, 2014: 132). As the author further notes "the phenomenon of early school dropout refers to people who left school or equivalent form of education. These people often obtained only first level of secondary education (ISCED 2 – in Poland the completion of ISCED 2 means the junior high school level education) or lower. At the same time in the period when they could make up for the effects of such a decision and improve their chances for active, lifelong education i.e. at the age of 18–24, they do not participate in further education or professional training" (ibidem: 132).

participate in democracy, of shaping civic attitudes in them. In this case learning was combined with direct involvement, thus granting a satisfying and sufficient level of knowledge in this field achieved without any special effort.

Participatory approach in theory

To present theoretical assumptions of participatory approaches certain selected concepts will be mentioned below (see for example: Anderson, 1998; Herr, 1999; O'Kane, 2008; Granosik et al., 2014; Gulczyńska, 2017). They were chosen due to the similarity of their approach to that of the current author as well as to the assumptions made at least in the initial phase of the project about the way of understanding participation at school. To complement the understanding of participatory approaches, the concepts of critical youth studies (see for example: Johnson, 2001; Schwartzman, 2001; Sibley, 1995) will be included. Making different ontological and epistemological assumptions rather than "traditional approaches" as to the way of understanding young age and young people, they explain the reasons why changing the way of treating youth and making their opinion important is necessary.

The basis for the participatory approach to working with children or youth is the approach that people legally categorised as minors are not passive participants of the process of socialisation but legitimate members of the society who, just like adults, create it and have the ability to transform it. Taking the above into consideration, their role in any aspect of life should not be limited but should be fully active (O'Kane, 2008). The application of this approach requires the consideration of many theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues. Youth, in the traditional approach, is defined in the context of biological age, which defines the level of an individual in the scope of psychological, social, or physical development. Based on age, various privileges and rights are conferred, such as the right to buy alcohol or cigarettes legally, the right to vote or work. On this basis it is also determined in what scope an individual has the possibility to get involved and make decisions on their own behalf. In this perspective youth is in the opposite situation to adulthood which, as Johnson (2001) and Schwartzman (2001) note, creates the situation in which young people enter into adulthood or come of age in isolation from the former stage of life – childhood – and in a way far away from it.

Participatory and critical approaches stand in opposition to the order in which age is seen as a sharp boundary that determines skills, abilities or rights of people, regarding this way of setting the boundary as unfair for

young people, as it suggests their development is incomplete and thus they are irrational as human beings. As a consequence of such age boundaries the practices aiming at protection, prevention and controlling of youth and their activity are legitimised and common (among others: Austin et al., 1998; Vadeboncoeur at al., 2005). As Johnson (2001) and Schwartzman (2001) note, such a way of describing and treating young people results in them taking up a lower and diminished position in the society in comparison to the high position of adults. What is more, the social order created by adults by means of a set of standards, rules and prohibitions limits the natural need of young people to act and actively participate, which later (in adult life) is perceived as valuable. Supporters of the critical rhetoric in the field of youth research object to such an order and regarding someone's abilities or limitations from the angle of biological age (Sibley, 1995). In exchange, they propose an approach removing the dichotomy between youth and adulthood; they also object to the privileged position of adults. The critically oriented researchers also propose the redefinition and transformation of the institutions (family, educational or legal), which in their current shape only stress the importance and role of adults. As David Cerecer Quijada et al. (2013) note, the role of the above institutions is the preparation of young people to adulthood, which, paradoxically, often entails protecting them from the reality of everyday life. Angela McRobbie (1994) and Nancy Lesko (2001) stress that excessive protection from the so-called "misguidance" becomes an excuse for adults to use various forms of supervision, control and correction of young people's behaviour. Critical research of youth stands in opposition to arbitrary division of young people into those who pose a threat and those who need to be protected from the threat. The first group, according to adults, needs discipline and punishment, the second group is regarded as potential victims and attributed good intentions in advance.

Changes in the approach to youth are, according to the representatives of critical trends, necessary and express concern for democratization and participation of young people in social life as legitimate active entities instead of objects of somebody's educational interventions. As D. Quijada et al. (2013) note, "youth and their activity should be treated seriously in accordance with the assumption that young people are citizens and not citizens in the making" (Quijada et al., 2013: 221). Due to the empowering approach towards youth, they start to develop in an unconstrained way, unleashing their natural need to act, not for specific benefits (for example a better grade at school), but because of the sense that this is what should be done. The conclusions from the research carried out by Daniels and Perry (2003) showed that for students in the process of education it is extremely important that their teachers support them and encourage them to express their opinions, to think critically and to be autonomous. The researchers

interested in the issues of youth education noted that in classes where teachers supported such practice, the students were better motivated, found learning more important and were significantly more involved in work at school (Daniels et al., 2001; Ryan, Stiller, 1991; Valeski, Stipek, 2001). The participation, as Waters-Adams (1994) observes, actively involves people in the process of understanding their way of acting. Thanks to the reflection over the current practice people are able to improve and reshape it. According to the above author, this plays a key role in the process of achieving mature thinking, the main pillars of which are democracy and cooperation (Waters-Adams, p. 197). What is more, the creation of participatory structures is an opportunity to listen to different voices and opinions on the vision of the future, politics etc. and provides information on the direction in which reality should be changed and shaped to become the participants' "own place", with people creating it actively involved in working and caring for it. The objective of participation is to counteract the routine form of lack of involvement, where some make the decision and the others wait for it to be made.

In Western societies, children's participation means their involvement in taking decisions affecting their social reality, while their point of view becomes visible and audible in various contexts. Anita Gulczyńska (2017) explains the term "participation", referring to the text where it is defined as "including children in decisions which affect their lives, the life of the community and wider society in which they live. It includes supporting children and young people in thinking about their business, in effective expression of their opinions and positive interaction with other people" (Save the Children, 2003; after: Gulczyńska 2017: 183). This researcher, citing Anita Franklin and Patricia Sloper (2005), distinguishes between individual and group participation. In the individual dimension it is carried out by children exercising "their rights to access services and opportunities offered by the society as well as taking part in the decisions that affect it" (Franklin and Sloper 2005: 183). The second (group) dimension focuses on "political and civic education, participation in decisions of group, local and social scope" (Franklin and Sloper 2005: 183). Both individual and group participatory models can be implemented in various contexts and social institutions, such as home, school, local community and even in a regional or global context. As the aforementioned researcher noted, in Poland particular emphasis is put on participation in educational types of institutions (Śliwerski, 2008; Andrzejewski, 2012; Jarosz, 2013; Śliwerski, 2013).

Researchers such as Diana McNeish et al. (2002) considered the reasons for taking into account and introducing participatory methods to various institutions in reference to their importance, roles, legislation, etc. Some arguments of the above authors are presented below:

- Acknowledging and respecting the rights of children as citizens and users of various services who participate in different institutions on the same conditions as others (for example adults);
- Carrying out legal duties resulting from the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989;
- Improvement and adaptation of social services addressed to children by systematically consulting on their needs with them. Only young people can help and identify the changing needs of their peers;
- Participation gives young people the possibility to have impact on and some choice of the provided services, which can be helpful for understanding their needs and for intentional decision-making;
- Participation improves the decision-making process; young people become more reflective but also more critical;
- Strengthening democratic processes. Democracy that includes representatives of new generation gains new opportunities;
- Young people become active members of the society, for example school, local or regional community;
- It strengthens child protection and prevents abuse towards them, which is possible for example when treating their words as we would treat the words of adults. The child stops being in a child-adult relationship in a less privileged position;
- Development of communication skills which can be useful in debates, negotiations, when setting priorities and making decisions. This proves beneficial in both everyday private and public life;
- It strengthens and increases self-esteem. Active participation provides the possibility to test one's own effectiveness and boost self-confidence.

On the other hand, Mariusz Granosik et al. (2014) emphasize that the use of the participatory approach as a method empowers the participants who in a classic order occupy an unprivileged position. In place of a traditional division based on "working for youth" approach, this publication proposes "working with youth". Young people, as legitimate citizens, have the right to co-decide and take action in the public space. Its introduction into a school environment is, however, a long and difficult process as it changes the classical order and hierarchy, with students becoming partners with the right to decide about matters related to school. In the next subsection of this chapter some problems will be presented that impeded the practical use of participatory approach at school.

Participatory approaches in practice – on the example of FYS – FORUMS Project

In FYS-FORUMS Project, the participation was understood as:

> youth being actively involved in decision-making and taking action in issues relevant to them. Within formal education, this could be seen as encompassing a learner-centred and participatory approach within both the formal curriculum and non-formal or informal learning" (Bourn, 2016).

The introduction of this approach to formal education was supposed to include students in a democratic process of decision-making in relation to school activity on a local, regional, or even global level. During the project implementation it was possible to achieve many of the goals, for example students became involved in the preparation of the forum, they joined the discussion; during the first forum young people discussed about the refugee crisis in Europe (people forced to flee), and Italian students came up with an idea how they could take care of people forced to leave their country, helping them best they could. However, in this subsection I would like to focus on things that made it harder (or even impossible) to fully introduce participatory approaches within the schools taking part in the project. All the parties involved in the project implementation – partner teachers, and students – in a way contributed to the lack of spectacular success in changing the approach to working at school into a participatory one.

Partners remind us again who these were

The biggest problem for this group was connected with fictitious agreement on the way of introducing work based on the rules of democratization and participation at schools. Despite agreeing on the understanding of the notion of 'participation' (defined at the beginning of this subsection) various members of the team interpreted its meaning in a different way.

Teachers

This professional group, despite the initial enthusiasm towards the idea of working with youth based on the participatory approach, was, as it turned out, not ready to introduce certain changes. The teachers were unwilling to hand the forums completely over to students. At the initial stage

of work, they would choose the people "worthy"[10] of participating in it. As they explained to us later, they did it because they wanted to be sure that the event would be a success, so they had to choose people they were certain would fulfil the entrusted tasks.

Another obstacle was lack of readiness to widen the students' scope of decisiveness. The teachers and management staff were informed about the possibilities of using the forum in their schools. Here are a few examples:

- Annual event promoting civic participation and involvement of youth within the institution with young people discussing social issues;
- The space for young people to make decisions, discuss and negotiate issues on a local and/or global level;
- Independent student community, with the right to participate in making decisions connected with the institution activity;
- Advisory body, the aim of which is to help management staff in making decisions;
- The space to exchange experience and create a cooperation network among young people from different institutions or even countries.

All schools chose to organize the forum as an annual event promoting participation and civic involvement of youth within the institution with young people discussing social issues, with some decision-making power in the scope of activity related to the subject of the discussion. It was the so-called "minimum plan", but the staff concluded that it was the only variant they could envisage at that stage of working with young people.

The school curriculum and fear of failing to implement it was another important element standing in the way and obstructing the implementation of the participatory approach. By extending the decision-making powers of students at school it could lead to failure in its implementation.

It is hard to evaluate the attitude and lack of staff's readiness to introduce the participatory approach at school as indisputably negative. Maybe, taking into consideration many determinants, such as for example the fact that the direction of changes was not suggested by young people but by some people from outside the school community, it was the only option possible. Moderation, in this context, may be considered an expression of care for the decision-making autonomy of the actual participants in this social space.

[10] Sinclair (2004) noticed for example a phenomenon posing a threat to participation, namely the selection of students who in the opinion of teachers "are suitable to participate". To take a closer look at this phenomenon, the researcher analyzed a dozen or so projects which assumedly worked with the use of the participatory approach which, however, does not mean that every young person has the same chances of being included. The ways of limiting the access are: selective information, individual invitations with teachers creating the general rule that "only the invited are welcome", and in the countries with numerous minority members, limitation of communication including unequal access to information and resources.

However, the biggest obstacle which was noticed during the talks both by teachers and students,[11] was the change of role and, consequently, the change of relationship between students and teachers. The teachers could not come to terms with losing their privileged position. Their fears were connected with further work with young people who, as they said, "when they feel that they are given more freedom, will stop listening to us".[12]

Students

The above problem of "going beyond the role" referred also to students, who, first of all, had problems putting themselves in the role of a partner of a teacher, not a student, and then they could not imagine a teacher who was no longer a teacher, in the traditional meaning of the word, having no power over students that in this context manifested itself by assessing the students' involvement in the forum implementation (how good was the student). The problem is related to the lack of mutual trust between students and teachers. This issue came up numerous times during the interviews with both groups. The teachers mentioned lack of trust towards students and tried to secure themselves from failure by choosing only some students, the "more trustworthy" ones, while students said they could feel their teachers' distrust towards them and treating them as people who, if left on their own performing some task, would not manage. What is more, the students seemed apprehensive of changing the 'old order', which in its current shape was perceived as obvious – "this is what school is about",[13] and rules at school. When referring to the responses of young people, it has to be pointed out that young people generally show a limited understanding of the need to participate in local/ global actions. At the same time they express some interest and wish to take part in them, but in most cases this results from external motivation, which means that they recognize their value because they allow them to achieve some personal benefits, e.g. a good report at school. They described their involvement in developing skills in a similar way: in terms of improving their position in school and in general in their future life, and this was the only part connected in any way with work. An analysis of responses across all the groups revealed two categories of participants. These categories are based on the discourse employed by the participants

[11] I refer to 2 rounds of focus interviews carried out with teachers and students from all the schools involved in the project. In total within 3 years of the Project duration 16 interviews were carried out (8 with teachers and 8 with students).

[12] Statement of one of the teachers.

[13] Statement of one of the teachers.

in their responses, their explication of their current understanding of the global citizenship issue, and their current level of engagement.

Some of the participants perceived this issue as influences that affected their personal life and they were interested in it – they were called "experience-oriented". Other participants explained the importance of the issue referring to school lessons – I called them "learning-oriented".

"Experience-Oriented"

"Experience-oriented" participants of focus groups are involved in a wide range of community activities. They are involved in volunteer work. Their responses reflect their personal (direct or indirect) experience in, for example, Civil Rights and racism. This was expressed in the following way:

> Black people still get insulted today. I've discussed this with my best friend and parents and my best friend said how unfair it was back then, all those people who seemed to make racism an actual thing, they deserved to die a long time ago. I thought violence isn't always the answer. I thought at one point, maybe if you try to talk to somebody and say that racism isn't a good thing, then they could change their mind on how white people and black people see things.

> I am not a Cypriot, so I would like to have the opportunity to present my country, our history to the rest of the school, and learn from others about their culture and other places in the world.

The "experience-oriented" group of participants has a much deeper and greater understanding of the need to be involved in such activities as volunteer work and various range of community work.

"Learning-Oriented"

This group of participants had some difficulties when trying to think about what global citizenship meant. At the same time, these participants, like all others, listed some issues of importance to them, such as climate change or human rights. However, as can be seen from the answers below, the global citizenship issue is important to them for other reasons than those mentioned by the "experience-oriented" group. Their comments in this particular context reflect their perspective on the significance of the curriculum and subjects where global citizenship is present and has to be passed. This group of participants agreed that they had discussed and learned about the suggested global issues during various lessons, and thought they were interesting to know about, however, they were not that different from other lessons and also they were quite difficult subjects. The discussion seemed to suggest that pupils were used to discussing global issues in their lessons and it was just a part of their normal learning.

Here are some comments:

Did you like learning about those issues? Do you think they're relevant?
3 – It was quite difficult.
1 – Well, it was like a normal lesson, just a different subject. Like always.

We have discussed climate change so many times that I don't won't to learn any more about that issue.

Concluding remarks

The inclusion of young people's voice and staying in touch with them during the decision-making process makes it necessary to consider several ethical issues that in a traditional school organization are not that noticeable. As Claire O'Kane and Nigel Thomas (1998) note, the majority of problems that need to be solved when working with young people are very similar to those encountered when working with adults. However, this does not mean that the two forms of cooperation do not differ from each other. The above authors encourage us to look for the little details and based on some reflection systematically improve the work effectiveness. Virginia Morrow (1999) emphasizes that the greatest ethical challenge for research or participatory practice is "levelling discrepancies in the scope of power and status between adults and children" (Morrow, 1999: 98). Thus, taking away the privileged position from adults and helping children and adults alike to come to terms with the new reality constructed according to totally different rules becomes extremely important. Erasing the traditional division of power is fundamental for the development of work based on the rules of participation, without it neither an adult nor a child would be able to become full participants of the project.

As Judith Ennew and Harriot Beazley (2006) note, another potential threat to working with young people on the basis of the participatory approach is tokenism, namely symbolical practice of minority inclusion, adopted by the representatives of dominant groups which, under the label of participation, aim at maintaining the old order. This kind of inclusion is limited to the scope of privileges granted to minorities by the privileged group and is also controlled by it. Kathryn Herr (1999) notes that the schools which undertake to apply the participatory approach and create the environment for the participants of this reality to be able to co-decide, in practice often bring about control of the discourse of changes under the cover of progressiveness. Thanks to this, the school maintains the old order and its *status quo*. When it happens, instead of helping in increasing activity, participation effectively limits it. Hampering the development in this context can be understood as intentional slowing down of bottom-up student

initiatives. Students would finally start demanding their rights and initiate actions aiming at it of their own accord. “Schools, according to Herr, create pseudo-participatory structures, the real goal of which is (…) to postpone the actual work on the reform of education” (Herr, 1999: 235). This threat gives rise to the need to consider ethical dilemmas connected with it: firstly, how to reduce inequality and over-activity of groups that form the majority. Secondly, in which fields and areas of life should young people have a real impact on the events, instead of the illusory sense of being in control. Apart from the discussion, young people should also have a chance to see the changes, the direction of which they discussed. The last ethical dilemma, mentioned by J. Ennew et al. (2006), is the issue of empowerment. In theory, each use of the participatory approach contains some empowering element, but the term can be understood in different ways. Therefore, it is worth asking at the beginning of work, what kind of empowerment do we expect? For example, do we want to change the current authority system? If a radical empowering solution is not our goal, do we only want to utilise it in some fields and if so, to what extent do we want to share the power (as practitioners). An important question is also what will the consequences of participatory approach implementation be, especially in case of its failure. In such a situation, it is worth considering from the start the method of restoring the balance lost as a result of the activities.

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Dilemmas in Participatory Approaches to Social Work

Abstract

Both the community work and the participatory research can be understood as approaches used in social work that increase participants' capacity to improve their lives and facilitate social change for the benefit of disadvantaged groups. In participatory approaches, dilemmas can arise, which are defined as a situation where a social worker faces two mutually exclusive choices, which he/she has to choose from. We also perceive dilemmas in both approaches as emerging in the interaction with the systems of values. The paper presents the findings from two research projects whose objectives included the identification of dilemmas from two areas, namely from community work and from a participatory approach to homeless mothers. The dilemmas are divided into two categories; from the perspectives of community workers and from a researcher's point of view. To interpret data we used the theory of empowerment and the typology of power by the authors John French and Bertram Raven (1960). As part of the discussion, the paper provides an overview of dilemmas in participatory approaches to social work research, on the example of the above-mentioned projects.

Introduction: social work, social justice and participation

Social work is a field based on values. The emergence of dilemmas is directly related to conflicts of interests and interactions with the systems of values – personal, social, legislative, professional, organization values and other levels of values (Mátel, 2012). Sarah Banks (2006: 6) defines values as "particular types of belief that people hold about what is regarded

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as worthy or valuable". Social workers are assumed to embrace a core set of values, most uniquely for social work for commitment to social justice (Banks, 2006). Social justice has, according to Derek Clifford and Beverley Burke (2008: 123–124) these components: fair distribution based on equal opportunity, limitation of institutional discrimination and oppression, equality of people to use opportunities without discrimination and equality as the end position, with goods and services shared fairly between individuals and groups.

The participatory approaches aim to introduce, based on a social justice value, formulas that allow participation to the groups with which unequal distribution crosses with insufficient recognition. The actual term participation means sharing something, participation or involvement in something (Albridge, 2015). S. Kindon, R. Pain and M. Kesby (2010) understand participatory approaches as the support of the "voice" of participants and the increase of their "power". Participatory approaches to social work are generally based on collaboration between a worker and "a non-academic player" (communities, interest groups etc.) (Taylor et al., 2004). Therefore, it is not a method that can be considered a key element of the participatory approach, but the approach of workers/researchers (Cornwall, Jewkes, 1995). The above themes do raise ethical requirements. Social workers can thus experience dilemmas that, according to David Hardcastle et al. (2004: 22), occur when "two ethical dilemmas require equal but opposite behaviour and the ethical guidelines do not give clear directions or indicate clearly which ethical imperative to follow".

Description of implemented participatory research projects

The aim of this contribution is to identify, analyze and interpret dilemmas that emerge from two participatory research projects; the first is an action research of a community work[1] by community workers in so-called socially excluded localities of the Moravian-Silesian Region, and the second one is participatory research carried out within the framework of the dissertation project entitled: *Reintegration*[2] *of Single Mothers from Shelters into Permanent Forms of Housing*.

Action research within community work was carried out with assistance of six community workers who worked in three localities labelled in the

[1] Hauteur and Henderson (2008) define community work as a "participatory approach to collective problems".

[2] Reintegration in terms of housing means finding a permanent home with a tenancy relationship with the homeowner outside socially excluded localities and unstable housing (such as housing in shelters or hostels) or overcrowded flats.

large-scale research financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as socially excluded (Čada, 2015). For the purpose of this ministerial research, locations with more than 20% concentration of persons living in inadequate conditions were considered excluded (indicated by the number of recipients of the State provided living allowance) and inhabiting a physically or symbolically delimited space (indicated by external identification). The action research was understood as a systematic collection of information and its reflection in order to achieve social change (Smith, 2007) and to implement reflexive practice and/or reflective decision-making (Winter, Munn-Giddings, 2011).

During 2014–2017, researchers regularly were meeting with community workers, reflecting on their work in localities, and providing support for planning of the social workers' next steps. In addition to this activity, six focus groups of community workers were organized to concentrate on the topics that were more commonly brought up during meetings. One of the topics was the dilemmas of community workers. Focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and open coding was co-created by academics and community workers. Based on the analysis, categories of dilemmas were defined.

The research question of *Reintegration of Single Mothers from Shelters into Permanent Forms of Housing* was to find out: "How is the intersectionality of oppression manifested in narratives of single mothers with experience of living in a homeless shelter, and how do these manifestations affect the process of reintegration into permanent housing?" A qualitative research strategy, in particular a participatory approach, was used in the research to implement the research. The research project was carried out during years 2014–2016 in collaboration with two peer researchers. Peer researchers participated in all stages of research. The selection of communication partners was carried out according to the rules of the snowball sampling. The research was attended by 5 mothers reintegrated into permanent housing, 18 mothers alternating stays in homeless shelters and 8 mothers leaving the homeless shelter. As part of the research, six focus groups were organized. The data was analyzed using Kathy Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory. The data related to research dilemmas was obtained from the researcher's logbook, which was maintained by the researcher throughout the time of the research and where she recorded both the course of the research and the experienced dilemmas.

Using the partial data from two different projects, we consider it important to highlight certain differences (different target groups, etc.); however we consider the identified dilemmas as comparable in the context of the participatory nature of both projects.

Dilemmas in participatory research

Based on data comparison obtained from both studies, we found out that the central part of most of the identified dilemmas was interpretation and understanding of the concept of power. We see power as always based on mutual relationships, when a powerful individual or group influences over the views, attitudes and behaviour of others (Lukas, Smolík, 2008). That is why we were looking for an interpretive tool that would allow us to categorize and interpret the results of our research in a new way. In designating the categories of dilemmas (the summary of these are presented in tab. 1) and their interpretation, we worked with the types of social power and different processes of social influence according to J. French and B. Raven (1960). They defined these five types of power:

- reward power based on ability to mediate rewards;
- coercive power based on ability to punish;
- legitimate power based on legitimate right to prescribe behaviour for him/her;
- referent power based on identification;
- expert power based on perception that the person has some special knowledge or expertness.

In compliance with the typology by J. French and B. Raven (1960), the authors Deborah Tolman, Mary Brydon-Miller (2001) and Bill Cooke, Uma Kotharti (2001) consider the social worker to be the bearer of power and they explain it by their ability to influence the research participants (e.g. by promising results, the ability to direct them to meet a particular goal, the ability to get certain knowledge from them and also the possibility of them exercising their authority). The above shows that there is a risk of a potential abuse of power; therefore there is a strong need for self-reflection in participatory approaches to social work. The objective of participatory approaches is empowerment, however, the social worker is still the one who drives the process (Kane, Poweller, 2008).

Table 1. Dilemmas in Participatory Approaches

Category	Dilemma
Reward power	Dilemma of demonstrating authenticity in participatory research vs. its masking to reach acceptance among research participants
	Dilemma of financial reward vs. no reward
Expert power	Dilemma of intellectual property in participatory approaches – participants or social workers
	Dilemma of setting goals of collaboration – participants or social workers
	Dilemma of termination of collaboration – participants or social workers
Legitimate power	Dilemma of whom to empower – who wants to cooperate vs. the most disadvantaged
Referent power	Dilemma of setting the boundary between participants and social workers
Coercive power	Dilemma of the social worker's liability for the sanctions imposed as a result of collaboration with him/her
Empowerment	Dilemma of the consequences of empowerment
	Dilemma of the boundaries/limits of empowerment – how much to encourage residents in negotiating with the bearers of power
	Dilemma to encourage or not to encourage criticism of authorities and institutions

Source: own construction.

Dilemmas related to reward power

The first group of dilemmas was related to the use of reward power when both the community workers and the researchers from the *Reintegration* research were perceived as individuals who could be the source of some profit, or else "reward". In this context, the researcher identified the dilemma of demonstrating authenticity in participatory research versus its masking to reach acceptance among research participants; that is, it is a dilemma whether to utilize the power of reward. Bella Mody (2003) notes that the researcher in participatory research needs to collaborate with research participants, and in some way "blend" with the research environment so that his/her presence in it is not disturbing. As part of a reflection on the role of the researcher,

> She noted that in some stories/narratives there were tendencies to "please" or "provoke pity" in a "powerful" listener and to guess what he/she would want to hear in order to derive some profit from it. Some things, on the contrary, were "concealed" to me as "the powerful".

Another dilemma in this group was whether participants in participatory approaches should be financially rewarded for their participation. Researchers from the *Reintegration* research reported in their logbook:

> Peer researchers have been financially rewarded for their participation in the research. I considered the reward appropriate because the communication partners devoted a lot of time to the research. Also, the research has laid down a number of requirements in terms of sharing (of often unpleasant) information on the communication partners. Using a financial reward in the research also allowed me to set up a more equal relationship in terms of power.

Another situation was in the community work project. Residents participated in activities with community workers without being entitled to any reward. Workers considered it one of the basic principles of the work and feared "deformation of relationships and motivation" (FG4[3]). Still, some workers had some doubts about "how much load to put on these people and how much activity they should ask from them" (FG4). In their views, participation is time-consuming and resource-intensive for the residents and poses certain risks for them. The workers asked questions such as: "Should I require them to invest in activities, the outcome of which is uncertain? A community worker is paid for it" (FG5) and:

> to what degree should I do things for them? ... Because I have my research connected with overloading them and I felt that these people already did so much in their free time while I was getting paid for it, and so it is a dilemma for me. So I feel like I am supposed to do something…so I'm sort of sorting out many things, organizing meetings, writing letters, even though the people could do it themselves (FG4)

This dilemma came up when workers had difficulty in distinguishing the task of responsibility between them and the residents: "What is my work and what is the work of the residents? I'm getting a salary, while they invest their free time – sometimes even several hours a week…" (FG5)

Dilemmas related to expert power

Another category of dilemmas was related to the expert power that results from a social worker being or not being under the impression of having more knowledge and access to information than other members of the group, and also having the ability to present them appropriately. A researcher from the *Reintegration* research had similar thoughts about it in her logbook:

> I was entering into the research environment from a certain position of "power" – I had knowledge of the environment of shelters, a university education, came from the middle class and had knowledge of how the research should be conducted. This position

[3] The abbreviation FG means a participant in the focus group. The abbreviation is followed by the identification number of particular participant.

> of "power" needed to be constantly reflected in the research. As part of a reflection of the above mentioned, I finally chose the role of a "harmless student" in the research.

L. Kane and M. Poweller (2008) write about this dilemma in the sense that in the participatory research the researcher is the "owner of knowledge", through which he/she actually says:

> You are a narrator, however, the knowledge is ours. Peer researchers worked for many hours upon the research… Despite their investment, this was research for my dissertation; in other words, the result of their efforts was left to me as a researcher.

Another dilemma emerging from expert power is dilemmas related to the setting of the goals of the cooperation. The research objective in participatory research was determined by a researcher. In the community project, the goals of cooperation were determined by people from the localities. Despite the declaration of an approach that perceives a participant as an expert on his/her own life difficulties and their choice of the way to address them, workers went through a dilemma about whether or not to bring up the topics in the project that had not been raised by participants. Those, in particular, concerned situations where, in the opinion of community workers, the interests of children were being damaged.

> They consistently insisted on working on the themes, but they did not introduce any theme involving children at all…so we did it a little from our own initiative. The dilemma is, if it is right, when we did not cooperate with them on their themes, but we put a little bit of our own perspective in them. In our view, there was a clear gap – no interest in the subject of the children. They were just tackling adult topics... (FG5).

This dilemma was also experienced when identifying general problems. The community workers questioned whether to work on problems defined by the residents when, according to their assessment, the problems were somewhere else. "...whether or not to bring in something of our own... when we see it there." "Residents articulate some needs, but we see that they also need something else that they do not explicitly ask for" (FG4).

Residents wished to implement activities to improve conditions in a socially deprived area. The critical question is whether strong attachment to place, which is one of the effects of community work, is a help or a hindrance in tackling the problems of exclusion within deprived areas. Although the residents had a strong relationship to the locality and wanted to make it more beautiful, workers were asking themselves the following question: "To support or not to support the relationship of the residents to a locality that is labelled as socially excluded?" (FG4). On the one hand, they concluded "there is nothing else to offer them anyway ... no one will accept them in market housing" (FG4). On the other hand, in their opinion, "young families with children should leave the locality. The children need to attend clubs and association outside a socially excluded locality. ... The tendency to improve the locality will stop this process and isolate people

therefore making the gap even bigger" (FG4). On the other hand, they realize that "they would be facing the same problems at another place too; a strong sense of belonging can improve the management of the situation, but also prevent inclusion in society" (FG5).

Expert power is also connected with who gets to decide about the termination of the cooperation; a dilemma related to whether to terminate research even when research participants want to continue. Participatory research requires engagement that tends to increase in the course of research (Albridge, 2015).

> At the end of my research, my peer researchers asked me to continue in some form. In the course of the research, we have established a relationship; peer researchers also stated that the research has been a source of inspiration for them and that it has led to their own change. They conveyed that the research really gave them a "voice" and did not want to lose it, which I understood. On the other hand the data was saturated and I felt like it was time to end the research.

Dilemmas related to legitimate power

Community workers aimed at the clients' empowerment, but at the same time voiced their concerns over strengthening the distribution of power in society. They formulated dilemma as a question of whom to empower in order not to encourage the unfair distribution of power in society. From their point of view, "people who are disadvantaged are primarily in need of support", but they have learned from their own experience that "individuals with no disadvantages who are interested in doing something for a locality are the ones who can be activated first", that is "people who have solved their own fundamental issues" (FG4). Their concern was that working with this group could contribute to "duplicating the distribution of influence similar to society and demotivating the socially disadvantaged" or to support "further separation inside the group" (FG5).

> The Roma in that council should not be ruled over by the non-Roma, who are better off, more communicative, and we experienced, for example, that a city deputy told us that he would only like to negotiate with non-Roma people and that we are not even expected to be there (FG4).

The certain base was a choice of the aims of the work , meaning "they set three goals and it was not just for the Roma or for just one part of the locality, but we worked on the topics and emphasized that it was about the whole community." (FG5) As part of the *Reintegration* research, the researcher did not identify this dilemma; she entered an environment with an already predetermined research objective. If the research reached a higher level of participation when participants chose a goal on their own while collaborating with a researcher, we could expect a similar dilemma to occur.

Dilemmas related to referent power

In the context of referent power, workers asked the question of where the boundary between a worker and "users" lies in participatory approaches. The topic of the boundaries was significantly reflected by the researcher both within the framework of *Reintegration* participatory research and the community workers. The researcher within the *Reintegration* research entered it with an idea that she would need to set some boundaries in the sense of protecting her privacy (researcher privacy) before the very beginning of the research. I was willing to offer as much openness as possible to maintain authenticity. "At a certain (limited) rate, I shared stories and themes from my own life with my communication partners. However, I made an effort not to go into matters that I have not been able to process and which personally touch me somehow".

Community workers discussed the issue of boundaries in both focus groups (FG4, FG5). Primarily, they asked themselves how to optimally set boundaries in cooperation with the residents who they perceive as their partners. Establishing personal relationships is crucial for their work.

> If those people became part of my heart, where actually is professionalism of a community worker and where is it not anymore, because those people have not been clients for me for a long time; they are my partners and friends, who I care about very much, but I was in the position of the social worker, so I pondered if I had it under control or didn't from this aspect (FG5).

Community workers reflected the risk that an overly close relationship may lead to identification with the problems of residents, which may limit their self-support capacity.

> We became awfully close to those people. I sometimes think whether or not it's professional, but on the other hand, I say let everyone say what he/she wants. I'm afraid now that somebody, for example, some officials or politicians, will treat them with such disdain (FG4).

Similarly, the implementer of participatory research reflected on her own experience. As part of the implementation of research, she entered the environment of the homeless shelter, which, especially at the beginning, made her feel rather confused.

> I saw the homeless shelter as a bounded environment (fence, bars in the windows, etc.), from where it is difficult to escape to the world outside. During story sharing, strong emotions were coming from communication partners, such as the inability to buy birthday presents for their children or their memories of domestic violence. I also met with communication partners (mothers living in shelters) who showed me bruises and injuries, not only on their own bodies, but also on their children's bodies. To maintain objectivity in such an environment was difficult.

Despite the declaration of a "friendly relationship" (FG4), community workers maintain a certain distance and do not carry out activities typical for friendly relationships.

> […] But I think we behave professionally, what's wrong about a closer relationship, treating them like partners ... If I took them home and lent them some money, then I would say it was unprofessional, but the fact that I'm glad we have become so close to them, does not seem to me as so unprofessional (FG5).

As a consequence of the partnership, they perceived the risk of a community worker being threatened as a result of activities in the interest of the residents. "I feel like I'm physically threatened, so I do not know how to deal with that, if it's honest to tell people that I can no longer continue, to tell them that I've empowered them, but I cannot do it anymore... I do not know" (FG4). One of the community workers, on the other hand, perceives as a consequence of a partnership an opportunity to communicate openly with these people. "I see it quite differently. Personally, I would try to become closer to those people because I'm part of the community… I would tell them, so they could help me not to feel it" (FG5).

Similarly, the researcher in the *Reintegration* research considered one of the most challenging research situations her own exposure to danger. "It was a situation when a friend of one of my communication partners tried to rob me. He found out when I was coming to and leaving the shelter and waited for me in a distant section of the road leading to the public transport stop".

Dilemmas related to coercive power

The use of coercive power as a result of participation in research was reflected by the researcher.

> A peer researcher had to look for housing during research, or more precisely she had to move to another shelter. However, an unnamed shelter, where she wanted to move, rejected her application. The reason supposedly was that she was involved in research, and that the shelter did not "support these activities" and that they "did not want to be slandered". Entering this situation, I was very much aware that participatory research had direct impacts on its participants, for whom I was somewhat responsible as a researcher.

Community workers also faced the use of coercive power as a result of a joint action with shelter residents. In order to achieve the common goal, they used the strategy of petition submission by the residents to point out poor housing conditions, and based on which an expert assessment of the dampness of the flat and its causes was carried out in a total of three flats. The result was "exemplary non-renewal of one of the tenants and the threatening of another" (FG4). After this experience, workers questioned themselves as "to what extent their role is to point out all the potential risks" (FG5) and experienced "responsibility for a lease non-renewal" (FG4).

Dilemmas related to power over one's life (empowerment)

Empowerment causes people to behave in a certain way. However, there is an issue of responsibility for this behaviour on the part of the researcher or community worker. The workers applying participatory approaches should therefore reflect on the "voice-granting" process and consider potential negative consequences, for example, in relation to a facility that expects its client to abide by certain rules (Albridge, 2015). Mike Kesby (2005) points out that participatory approaches often lead to a change in personality, namely, that "the one who entered in does not come out as the same person". In this context, both the researcher and community workers asked: What are the implications of empowerment?

The implications of empowerment are reflected by researchers in the "*Reintegration*" research in their logbook as follows:

> Peer researchers had a rather complicated role in research. All of a sudden, they became researchers out of the "normal" users of the shelter. They were somehow elevated/superior to others. They were granted the right to ask, thus becoming the insiders of research, which gave them power. This situation also needed to be reflected and not to cast peer researchers into the role of those who know the solutions to problems that they can suggest to others.

Another question community workers asked themselves was – where the boundaries of self-confidence and empowerment of people were. Similar to the researcher, they reflected on a certain "extraction" of the shelter residents from their natural social relationships and structures. "[…] then they often hear that they are "mayors", they get to decide about everything and that they manage everything" (FG5). There was a concern about "a pseudo-help to resident representatives, since they could act in a directive manner with other residents later" (FG5), expressed by representatives of one municipal authority in one of the evaluation meetings.

Participatory research may also result in internal change. The researcher in the "Reintegration" research notes the following:

> Research has had a certain "therapeutic effect" on peer researchers, which they often mentioned in their reflections and feedback. This effect was very similar to the effect of narrative therapy. Their own stories and insights had changed during the research, thus changing the view of their own identity.

As a result of the empowerment process, research participants have become more critical of authorities and institutions. In this context, a dilemma arises as to whether or not to support such criticism towards authorities and institutions. As part of the interviews with the communication partners (mothers living in shelters), the researcher strived to maintain a neutral stance towards these attitudes.

> In the case of social workers or accommodation facilities being perceived in a negative manner, the communication partners expected me to be "on their side" and

> "advocate" for them. To clarify my position, I often had to reflect my attitudes so that my subjectivity in research was related to the subject of the life situation of these mothers in the shelter as well as to the process of their reintegration, and not to the subject of a particular shelter facility or a particular social worker. However, the above-described role was not easy to play at all, and within the framework of research reflexivity, I must admit the tendency to adopt the perspective of peer researchers.

Other community workers' doubts concerned the limits of empowerment. They questioned to what extent they should support residents in negotiating with the bearers of power.

> The resolution of their problems is not possible otherwise, but are we able to predict all the risks? Do the residents actually have sufficient capacity and influence to affect these matters? Could it be effective, and under what conditions? ... They constantly complained they could not change anything ... We found out that we would not be able to change it…that there are some matters that we cannot affect and it does not make sense to deal with them and try to solve them…but it took us a long time to realize this. (FG5)

Discussion and conclusions

In achieving empowerment as a goal of participatory approaches and a means of strengthening social justice, the workers have to deal with dilemmas based on other aspects of the phenomenon of power.

The topic of power in participatory approaches can be summed up by the fact that even though the position of a community worker both in the participatory research and the community work is defined as being as equal as possible to their participants and that all participants are granted the right to their own knowledge and expertise, the community worker enters an environment with a certain "handicap" of expertise (Mody, 2003). He/she enters an environment where people have a completely different identity from him/her, comes from a different cultural background, has a different education, speaks in a "different" language, is dressed and behaves differently (Walmsley, Johnson, 2003). In participatory approaches there is a "paradox in the redistribution of power". A social worker enters the research environment as a person with "high educational quality" and with a lot of information, which plays a major role in influencing the "local" population. The social worker as a person with a strong knowledge base influences the "mind of the weaker participants" (Kane, Poweller, 2008).

The participatory approach goes beyond not only the boundaries between the researcher and the participant of the research, between the community worker and the client (Kindon, Pain, Kesby, 2010). A specific feature of this approach is also the reduced ability to plan and "to expect in relation to it", due to its social dynamism, i.e. due to the ever-changing relationship with peer collaborators. A participatory approach should therefore be seen as a process that increases participants' capacity

to improve their lives and facilitates social change for the benefit of disadvantaged groups (Cleaver, 1999) and reinforces the achievement of social justice. Ethics is therefore directly (and completely) associated with practice (Reason, Bradbury, 2013), and that is why it brings greater challenges for the worker. Due to the above-mentioned reason, participatory approaches have their typical dilemmas, amongst which are the dilemma of control sharing, the dilemma of anonymity, the dilemma of giving a voice to the oppressed, but also the dilemma of the possible controversy of social events (Kindon, Pain, Kesby, 2010) and/or tensions between individual fortunes and collective ones (Kenny, 2002).

A worker (community work or social work researcher) using participatory approaches must therefore "make a dialogue about core values", "multiplicity of interests, some clear and some not", because "conflicts over underlying goals and values can´t all remain easily explored" (Briggs, 2007: 2). The tool of social work that can help the social worker is reflexivity. This reflexivity can be defined in accordance with M. Payne (2005) as a cyclical process in which we study what kind of impact the thing or matter that we observe has upon our thinking, and how our thinking process further influences our actions. In both applied participatory approaches, all of the above mentioned levels appear to be tools for recognition and further work with dilemmas.

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Lines of Activity Addressed to Families: Limiting the Participatory Approach as with Casework Practitioners

Abstract

The chapter shows the course of activity of family assistants – caseworkers situated in the field of child protection practice in Poland. The contribution undertakes a reflection on the constraints in the implementation of the participatory approach which is found in the process of activities performed by assistants. These constraints are related to the scale of the problems faced by family members, as well as the wider determinants of institutional and legislative issues that prescribe the formal framework for the activity of caseworkers. The chapter describes the types of participation of family assistants and users that show the real face of participation, located in the field of social work with families, in particular in relation to child protection practice.

Introduction

The concept of participation is often referred to as contentious, which results from the multiplicity of definitional approaches and the constant variability of the scientific discourse on the subject (Croft, Beresford, 1992: 20). One of the important reasons for this is that the idea of participation acquires a definite, not abstract, meaning when it is located in a concrete context dimension (e.g. it concerns formation of various social movements, creation/transformation of social policy instruments, implementation of a specific practice of activity including conducting research).

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In this chapter, the issue of participation is considered in relation to the practice of activities of family assistants. The assistants support the families recognized by the representatives of the social welfare system as "experiencing difficulties in fulfilling care and educational functions" (*Ustawa z dnia 9 czerwca 2011 roku o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/Act on Supporting Family and the Foster Care System*, 2011: Art. 2 (1)). These are often parents under the supervision of a family probation officer who have limited parental rights and also parents who are trying to get their children – that have been temporarily placed outside the family – back from foster care facilities (Ibid.: Art. 10 (4)).

In the years 2005–2011 family assistants were employed as part of system projects co-financed from the European Social Fund, within municipal programmes funded from the city budget, projects financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and inter-ministerial activities (Krasiejko, 2010: 100). In 2012, *Ustawa z dnia 9 czerwca 2011 roku o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/*the *Act on Supporting Families and the Foster Care System*, which introduced the profession of family assistant into the structures of Polish social welfare, came into force. In the years 2012–2014, the employment of assistants was of an optional nature. Since 1 January 2015, the legal obligation to employ assistants in the commune and municipal social welfare centres has become effective. From the entry of the Act into force until the end of 2014, family assistants looked after up to 20 families each. Since 1 January 2015, the number of families supported simultaneously by an assistant has decreased to 15 (*Funkcjonowanie asystentów rodziny w świetle ustawy o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/Functioning of family assistants in the light of The Act on Supporting Family and the Foster Care System*, 2014: 16).

The procedure for assigning an assistant to a given family is governed by the legal Act, which says that a social worker applies to the head of a municipality welfare centre with a request to assign assistant to a family (*Ustawa z dnia 9 czerwca 2011 roku o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/Act on Supporting Family and the Foster Care System*, 2011: Art. 11(3)). Assistants, as part of working with individual families, cooperate with social workers. According to the Act, assistants are required to consult with social workers on the plan of work with the family (Ibid.: Art.15(1).1).

The aim of this contribution is to distinguish the types of participation of assistants and family members in the process of activity that takes place in the field of child protection practice. Interpretation of the family assistants' narrations allows us to determine the limitations in the application of a participatory approach in the area of social work with families that are considered to be experiencing difficulties in fulfilling care and educational functions.

On the basis of the reconstruction of assistants' activities, which takes into account their point of view, one can see the problematic nature, and even the inability, to implement specific goals of the participatory approach to child protection practice, such as: co-creating a partner relationship (Levin, Weiss-Gal, 2009: 194; Healy, 1998: 900; Turnell, 1998: 2–3); compliance with the principle of reciprocity (Shemmings D., Shemmings Y., 1995), treating service users as equal partners (*Family Involvement in Public Child Welfare Driven Systems of Care*; 2008: 1), non-judgmental approach (Beresford et.al., 2008: 1397); ensuring freedom of choice (Croft, Beresford, 2002: 78).

The chapter shows the limitations of the participatory approach in child protection practice that were reconstructed from narrative interviews with family assistants. The contribution contains a brief description of the research on the course of the family assistants' activities. The research results show the reconstructed lines of activities that the assistants address with the families with whom they work. These areas/lines of activities reflect the types of participation of assistants and parents in the activity process. The conclusions concern the sources of difficulties of assistants related to the implementation of a participatory approach, and discrepancies between theoretical assumptions related to participatory practice and its actual application in the field of social work with families.

Debate on the limitations of participatory approach in child protection practice

Due to the complex nature of child protection work, this makes it difficult to translate the ideals of participation into reality (Farrell: 2004). Karen Healy examined the discourse about participation on child protection practice (1998). The author distinguished three limitations to the achievement of participatory practice processes: firstly – issues related to the service users' capabilities, and secondly, the attitude of practitioners, and thirdly, the organizational context (Ibid.: 902–904).

Firstly, it is suggested that limited capacity to engage on equal footing with cooperation with practitioners comes from personal, social and economic deprivations to which many clients have been subject (Ibid.: 902; see also: Polansky et al., 1979: 152). This point of view is confirmed by studies carried out by Julia Littel and Emiko Tajima (2000). The analysis carried out by researchers was based on data gathered during a large-scale evaluation of family preservation services (FPS) in Illinois, USA (Ibid.: 412). Julia Littel and Emiko Tajima (2000) state that workers of family preservation services (FPS) report lower levels of collaboration in cases

with substance abuse problems, parental mental health problems, and severe child-care skill deficits (Ibid.: 424).

Karen Healy, Yvonne Darlington and Judith A. Feeney (2011) reported their research findings from the study of young families' participation in decision making in child welfare services, conducted from 2006 to 2009 in Queensland, Australia. Respondents were recruited through the statutory child protection authority (the Department of Child Safety) and the non-governmental agencies that provided early intervention and family support services to vulnerable families (Ibid.: 284). The interviews they conducted showed that respondents (mothers engaged with a child protection or family support service) pointed out the barriers with their participation, resulting from life problems they are struggling with, which for them, are related with high level of chaos in the family's life (Healy, Darlington, Feeney, 2011: 286). More specifically, they point to problems related to homelessness, domestic violence, drug/alcohol abuse, and/or mental health issues were identified by them as severely limiting their capacity to understand and engage with service (Ibid.). The same researchers also conducted research with 28 practitioners from five service types: child advocacy, child protection, domestic violence service, family support and intensive family support (Darlington, Healy, Feeney, 2010: 1022). Interviews that were carried out with practitioners included a discussion focused on participants' ideas about and experiences of participation, and their responses to a practice vignette (Ibid.: 1021–1022). The analysis of interviews shows that the quality of parents' participation in the support process depends on their willingness to make changes in their lives in order to improve the children's wellbeing and also, on the need to engage: to take part in conversations about their children's needs, and an ability to understand that aspects of their own behaviour would need to change (Ibid.: 1023). Without these contingency factors, parents' participation is not possible (Ibid.).

Margaret Bell (1999) conducted research with twenty-two British local authority social workers carrying out child protection investigations. She used a semi-structured questionnaire (Ibid.: 439–440). According to the participating social workers, when families did not share the professionals' judgement of their parenting behaviours connected with abuse and neglecting, full partnerships seemed unrealistic (Ibid.: 447). The social workers also paid attention to the limited participation of family members who have neither the power, nor the choice, to withdraw from the engagement or, in many cases, to negotiate the terms of it (Ibid.: 451). From the perspective of the respondents, the attitude of families can become an important barrier in mutual cooperation. Many of them were difficult to access or hostile to the intervention (Ibid.).

Secondly, the attitude of practitioners can also be a limitation to the implementation of a participatory approach in child protection practice.

According to Andrew Turnell (1998), paternalism remains the dominant paradigm behind professionalism in this field of practice (Ibid.: 2).This means that practitioners rely mainly on their own opinions and treat what service recipients think as secondary (Ibid.). This kind of attitude is an obstacle in the construction of a partnership based relationship, inscribed in a participatory approach, in which practitioners are valuing their own knowledge and authority and at the same time feel secure enough to make professional knowledge and assessments vulnerable to family knowledge, perspectives and judgements (Ibid.: 4). Frequently it is asserted that, despite the popularity of the notions of participation and partnership, practitioners are often highly reluctant to relinquish their professional power and status in order to engage in more equitable and participatory relations with service users (Healy, 1998: 903; see also: Calder, 1995: 757).

The attitudes of practitioners that are not conducive to a participatory approach can be combined with their quality of micro-skills of how one builds a partnership. Noteworthy are the studies carried out by Donald Forrester, Jim McCambridge, Clara Waissbein and Stephen Rollnick (2008). They examined 40 family social workers who worked for local authorities in London (Ibid.: 28–29). Analysis was based on practitioners' responses the "vignettes" with scenarios focused on simulated situations where there were concerns about child welfare and the parents' resistance was clearly demonstrated (Ibid.: 26–28). Key findings from this research indicated a pervasive confrontational style of interaction – a high level of confrontation and a low level of listening (Ibid.: 28–30). According to the authors, lack of ability to deal with clients' resistance means that family social workers are inadvertently increasing the likelihood of such difficult responses from the parents they work with (Ibid.: 32).

Thirdly, the organizational contexts in which child protection practice occurs can be seen as limited in regard to a participatory ethos (Healy, 1998: 903). The author points to the characteristics of many child protection agencies, particularly the high caseloads and limited resources as a reason for lowering the quality of relationship between workers and service users and for the development of an infrastructure to support participatory approach (Ibid.). Another problem that arises, according to the organizational context, is an unsupportive work environment. It would appear that child protection organizations do not often deal well with the professional support oriented towards increasing skills and knowledge useful for dealing with development of participatory culture and practice (Ibid.: 903–904; see also: Morrison, 1996: 131; Hernandez et al., 2008).

In addition, some authors emphasize that difficulties in implementing a participatory approach in child protection work are connected to the complex status of parents in this field of practice where parents present simultaneously as citizens who have basic rights, as carers of children,

and as the subjects of child protection allegations (Darlington, Healy, Feeney, 2010: 1020; see also: McLaughlin, 2007). Where children's safety and wellbeing are at risk, there may be conflicts between the goal of participation and child welfare professionals' duties and responsibilities. In particular, child protection professionals have legal obligations and public responsibilities that emphasize the need to protect children from harm. Further, they face pressure to resolve child welfare concerns in a timely manner (Maiter et al., 2006; Munro, 2002). Martin Calder (1995) claims that most interventions entail the exercise of social control under the pretext of providing welfare (Ibid.: 752). When an agency takes a decision to intervene through court proceedings, partnership may seem a meaningless concept. Power is very much concentrated on one side (Ibid.: 758). For the difficulties in maintaining the balance between care and control in child protective practice, see the work of Margaret Bell, already mentioned earlier (1999: 450).

The research I carried out with the family assistants is in line with the discussion on the limitations of the participatory approach in the child protection practice. From the perspective of assistants, the main cause for these limitations lies in the capacity of clients using their services. However, my research goes beyond the simple indication of these limitations from the perspectives of family assistant. Research analysis allows us to see the relationship between the course of activities directed to families and the assessments (categorizations) of individual family members as formulated by the assistants.

In addition, in the ongoing discussion, there are strands emphasizing the limitations of the participative approach resulting from taking compulsory actions based on legal bases (Calder, 1995; Littel, Tajima, 2000). In my research it turned out that the problem in including families in the process of activity is the usage of conflicting legal instruments or their abuse. In the light of the applicable Polish law, assistants act on a voluntary basis with families, while family probation officers have the right to use compulsory instruments. Probation officers sometimes under coercion oblige families to cooperate with assistants who no longer have the opportunity to work with them as voluntary clients. Social workers, who refer families to assistants, sometimes abuse their power, threatening their families with the loss of financial support or other privileges if they do not start working with their assistants. In both cases, the assistants are not able to work with such families on a voluntary basis.

By their nature, the interactions between child protection workers and their clients are complex and challenging to observe directly. Researchers have therefore tended to rely on retrospective accounts from participants (Forrester, McCambridge, Waissbein, Rollnick, 2008: 24). Most research studies based on restrospective accounts can be criticized for being

influenced by a desire to justify actions or to portray oneself in a positive light (Silverman, 2001). For this reason what social workers, parents and others claim happened is unlikely to be accurate (Forrester, McCambridge, Waissbein, Rollnick, 2008: 25). On this background, my research is distinguished by a different cognitive perspective – Jean Marie Barbier's transversal analysis of the activity (2006, 2016). In my research, I analyzed the narrations about the work of family assistants, not to determine their credibility but to get the meaning that assistants give to their activities, which confirms the reflective and interpretive nature of their knowledge. Based on their knowledge, I tried to reconstruct the course of their activities, which included an interdependent type of participation between assistants and families.

Research methodology

This contribution is based on narrative research conducted in 2011–2017. One of the research outcomes was a doctoral thesis titled: *Tożsamość profesjonalna w narracjach asystentów rodziny*/*The professional identity in narratives of family assistants* (Kamińska-Jatczak, 2017). The research material consisted of thirteen narrative interviews conducted with family assistants, which began with an opening question, a "narrative-generative question" (Hopf, 2004: 206): "tell me about your work". The research consisted of analytical interpretation of the collected interviews, performed mainly with the use of the coding procedure drawn from the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The stories of family assistants reflected the language of activity they used. The narrators used expressions that acted as "intellectual categories", important for reading the meanings inherent in their discourse concerning their own activity (see e.g.: Barbier, 2006: 255–256; Barbier, 2016: 20–21).[1] In other words, in my analysis, I tried to understand the specific language of individual assistants, so as to properly understand the course of activities he/she was talking about. Important intellectual categories that assistants used, were identified as about naming the essence of activities undertaken by them or by the families, as well as assessing the possibilities of the participation of the particular families they cooperate with. The expressions that act as intellectual categories, which I quote later in the chapter, are marked in italics.

[1] Intellectual categories reflect the idiomatic nature of an individual language, contains phrases reflecting the meaning that the narrator gives to his/her activity. It is worth emphasizing the difference between intellectual categories and "in vivo codes" that are used in grounded theory. In vivo codes reflect not the specificity of an individual language, but rather a part of a local discourse understood by a specific group (Charmaz, 2006: 55).

As I mentioned before, the theoretical framework of the conducted research was a transversal analysis of the activity as developed by Jean-Marie Barbier (2006, 2016). From this perspective, the effect of my research concerned the interpretation based on the comprehensibility of the meanings inherent in their discourse about their ongoing activity[2]. The concept of "comprehensibility" (Fr. *intelligibilité*) is understood here as a type of reflection oriented towards the analysis and interpretation of one's own or other people's practice (Barbier, 2006: 256).

The results of the research have not been consulted about with the family assistants at the time of writing, although the further research intent is to use the analytical interpretation in the supervisory activities addressed to them. From the socio-pedagogical point of view, the aim is to stimulate the professional development of family assistants associated with the acquisition of awareness of activity, i.e., being aware of their own activity – with the senses and meanings assigned to it – and the specificity of one's own participation in it (the adopted orientation) (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2006: 96–97, 481–485).

The conclusions drawn from the research show the child protection practice as a process of activity, which is constructed and transformed through the dynamics of mutual relationships and interactions between assistant and family. From this point of view, this interpretation should be perceived as an attempt to capture the perspective of one category of participants in the process of activity, i.e. the practitioners (family assistants). In order to obtain a more complete interpretation of the process of child protection practice, the viewpoint of the addressees of this activity should also be taken into account.

Lines of activity addressed to families

Each family assistant carries out many different lines of activity – formulas of activities consisting of a series of individual interactive events that are linked by a specific goal. These lines of activity are tailored to the specific category of families to which they are addressed. Categorizing families, and thus interpreting data about them, is associated with determining their ability to take independent activity. The assessment of the possibility of participation of family members in the process of activity translates into the course of specific lines of activity (Kamińska-Jatczak, 2016).

[2] The conceivability of meanings inherent in the narratives of assistants was also based on the researcher's own knowledge. The researcher worked in the years 2009–2011 as a family assistant in one of the municipal social welfare centres.

Sherry Arnstein (1969), based on the analysis of the area of citizen participation, created the *Ladder of Citizen Participation* showing different levels of involvement (Ibid.). Thus, she showed how the quality of participation in the process of activity which takes various forms should be analyzed. Analogously to S. Arnstein, in my research – embedded in the different field of child protection practice – I tried to look for distinct types of participation of family assistants combined with specific types of family members' participation. However, I did not use the typology of Arnstein, but I tried to extract characteristic types of participation that could be reconstructed from family assistant's narrations.

I tried to look at the assistants' narratives about their activity in terms of seeking the attributes of the participatory approach. The separated lines of activity (tab. 1) show various types of family assistants'and family members' participation in the process of activity, which are characterized by a greater or lesser level of directiveness and mobilization to undertake independent activity. This issue is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Against the background of the assistants' activity, emerges the nature of parents' participation in this process. The table below presents the types of parents' participation in the support process, which are the expected types of engagement that family assistants seek as part of the particular line of activity.

Table 1. Types of participation of assistants and parents in the process of activity

The name of the line of activity	Type of assistant's participation	Type of parents' participation
The cat-and-mouse game	Trying to make contact	Avoiding contact, non-participation
Watching over	Controlling family matters	Giving in to control
Leading by the hand	Giving orders, taking over the initiative	Executing commands, submission/compliance
Targeting for independent activity	Stimulation for independent activity and taking the initiative	Overcoming difficulties in undertaking independent activity
Stimulation to self-reflection	Inducing self-reflection, directing the reflection	Taking up the challenge of self-reflection
Learning together	Solving problems together, reciprocity	Empowerment in the process of activity, becoming a partner for the assistant

Source: elaborated by the author.

In the further part of the contribution, the activity lines listed in the table are discussed. These lines, discussed below, reflect the related types of participation of assistants and users of their services.

Cat-and-mouse game

According to the assistants, it is extremely difficult or even impossible to contact families who *avoid* meetings (they do not open the door, leave the house during prearranged visits, do not answer the phone). When the meeting finally takes place, family members may falsify the contact – "lie", "pretend" etc.

Resistance on the part of some families to contact with a family assistant is a consequence of the inability to make a voluntary choice. According to the collected narratives, parents are sometimes forced to cooperate with family assistants by social workers and family probation officers who threaten them with consequences – refusal of financial support or placement of children in foster care institutions. When families are faced with coercion, they treat the visits of family assistants as intrusive. Littell and Tajima, who examined workers and recipients of family preservation service, also pay attention to the difficulty of cooperation with involuntary clients (2000: 407).

In such families, family assistants strive to seek and establish contact, which one of them referred to as a *cat-and-mouse game* (N5). The meetings were rare and irregular, which prevented the practitioner from being active in promoting family participation in the change process. The following fragment of the narration illustrates this line of activity.

Line of activity – *cat-and-mouse game*

> Male family assistant (N5): (…) if this person does not see the need for change, is not motivated, there start all kinds of strange things happening, like people do not open doors, avoid contacts, do not answer phones, stop contacting (...) often after three weeks it turns out that we have seen each other once or twice (...) it comes to a situation (...) where we are really starting to chase a client visiting his family, (...) who lives, for example, in the same tenement house, or in a tenement house next door. We start looking for him or her and it's like playing a cat-and-mouse game. It is interesting that when you look at it from this perspective, you can even perceive it as fun, and not as work, because this is what it really comes down to.[3]

This line of activity is an example of the inability to cooperate with parents who become involuntary clients since they are not motivated for any cooperation with the family assistant.

According to Suzy Croft and Peter Beresford, giving people choices is the basic condition for constructing participatory practice as part of social

[3] The chapter contains excerpts from narrative interviews with family assistants. The selected quotes – in order to enhance their clarity – were written using punctuation marks and without sounds associated with thinking, such as mmm, uh, etc. Transcription of the original narration is included in the doctoral dissertation entitled: *Professional identity in the narratives of family assistants* (Kamińska-Jatczak, 2017).

work (2002: 78). Unfortunately, the legislative bases that determine the voluntary support of family assistants are not comparative in this regard. *Ustawa z dnia 9 czerwca 2011 roku o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/The Act on Supporting Family and the Foster Care System* determines the voluntary nature of using the support provided by the assistant (2011: Article 8, Paragraph 3). On the other hand, *Kodeks rodzinny i opiekuńczy*/*The Family and Guardianship Code* permits the possibility to oblige parents to take up co-operation with the family assistant in the situation of "threat to the good of the child" (1964: Art. 109, Paragraph 1, Paragraph 2, Item 1). Such ambiguous legal grounds generate certain consequences in the form of involuntary clients, which is a serious barrier preventing cooperation with such parents.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that in the discussed line of activity we cannot speak about the participation of family members in the process of activity, who avoid contact with assistants, because they feel forced to do so. Assistants in this situation cannot provide support, because his/her activity is limited only to unsuccessful attempts to make a contact.

Watching over

Watching over is a line of activity initiated in the case of family members who are considered incapable of adequately parenting their children additionally categorized as "parents with schizophrenia".

The activity of family assistants addressed to these service users involves caring and control and is a response to their mental health problems and unpredictability. The psychological instability of parents is referred to also by other researchers as one of the main reasons for interventions among families affected by mental illness (see e.g.: Dawson, Berry, 2002: 307; Menahem, Halasz, 2000). Limited possibilities of parents to take control over their own affairs related to mental health problems were a clear barrier preventing the increase and transformation of the quality of their participation in the support process.

The essence of the assistants' participation in this type of activity line is supervision over the course of family matters related to: health (controlling: dosing of drugs, doctor appointments, visits to the ward); education (controlling: attendance at school, payments); hygiene (monitoring the hygiene of the children). The following fragment of the narration contains the characteristics of *watching over*.

Line of activity – *watching over*

> Female Family Assistant (N8): (…) you really had to watch over this lady and it was like this that when she started to get sick, she started to wander around the city, not open the door (...) in this family there was also completely different work. Here it involved contacting the school, piloting the boy's affairs at school, checking whether he goes to

> school, whether all contributions are paid, whether he is clean or dirty. Such a way of probing every time that when there was such negligence when it comes to hygiene, it was known that something was starting to happen to his mother. Whether she is taking drugs or going to this ward (this refers to a day attendance psychiatric ward). In the course of work, we managed to change to injections taken every two weeks, which this lady had to take and there had to be such a continuity. Because at the beginning it was so that she had to take the medicine three times a day and it was necessary to watch over whether she was taking the drugs or not, whether she was under the care of a psychiatrist, or went to these visits. A lot of such work based on the principle of watching over, (...) it went on well for a long time, until it turned out that this illness, nevertheless, progresses, and that despite this care, relapses are more frequent. The lady started to disappear. We managed to find a place for this boy in a foster family home, and he will be transported there (...).

Family members categorized as having a diagnosis of schizophrenia, due to the cyclical nature of their disorders, seem to be often unable to take control and accountability over their own affairs. Andrea Reupert and Darryl Maybery, who have reviewed interventions aimed at families affected by mental illness, have a similar opinion (2007: 365).

The example of *watching over* described in the above fragment of the narrative indicates that it was also of a preventive character. Regular monitoring of family life allows identification of periods of relapse and implementation of appropriate intervention measures (Ibid.: 367).

The participation of assistants in this line of activity consisted in taking control over the members who passively underwent this form of support due to their psychological inability to take the initiative and make independent decisions. Participation of assistants in the support process comes down to controlling family matters, while the participation of family members is limited to giving in to control.

Leading by the hand

According to the family assistants, in some families it was only possible to perform care and guidance activities called by them *leading by the hand*. Assistants started this kind of activity line in relation to family members with serious and chronic problems in many areas of their functioning. Such parents were categorized by them in various ways, such as: intellectually disabled,[4] extremely inefficient in terms of caring for their children – *those with depressive states, alcoholics, those with schizophrenia*. Taking into

[4] Categorizing family members as intellectually disabled or schizophrenic has not always been associated with a medical diagnosis, which the persons often did not have due to the lack of adequate medical tests, lack of consent to carry out such tests, lack of documents specifying the type of disorder, etc. This kind of categorization has most often been associated with “the observer’s point of view” (Söder, 1989: 119) – an assistant who interpreted the capabilities of families to undertake independent activities in this way.

account the perspective of family assistants, the listed categories of family members can be collectively defined as having limited ability to undertake independent activities.

Family members categorized in this way were perceived by family assistants as unable to make independent, beneficial life choices. As a result, the assistants decided to take over the initiative in the decision-making process related to the direction of the undertaken activity.

The inclusion of family members in the activity process took place on a passive basis. The family assistant in the course of *leading by the hand*, took over the initiative, decided on what is "to be done" and how to do it, showed, instructed, while the family, at most, reenacted/implemented the assistant's instructions.

The assistants' narratives indicate that they mobilized the activity of family members in the form of fulfilling orders which J. Littell and E. Tajima called "compliance" (2000: 41). Kari Dawson and Marianne Berry cite research by these researchers and point to this type of parental participation in the support process, as one of the more commonly used by child welfare practitioners (2002: 296). This type of participation on the part of the parents consists of keeping appointments and completing tasks with an active support of the assistant in their performance.

The line of activity in question was launched in the process of performing specific activities, such as: handling family matters in institutions – offices, medical facilities, nursery, school, etc.; running the household – cleaning, cooking, arranging a menu, shopping, etc.

The following fragments of the narration depict the line of activity in question.

Line of activity – *leading by the hand*

Male family assistant (N1): (…) she could not go anywhere without me, that is go to the office, go to the doctor – because she is treated by a psychiatrist – go to the administration office, set up a bank account, it was also a problem, so we had to go everywhere together.

Female family assistant (N4): for example, I have intellectually disabled clients, where I really have to go to the offices and doctors with each of them. Not only with them, because they have their own affairs neglected, not straightened out, without medical decisions that have expired long ago, but there are also issues related to children. Children without medical decisions, without medical consultations. Well, as you know, to every specialist – a referral (...) anyway, if someone does not take them by the hand in these cases and does not go, nothing will progress.

Female family assistant (N8):(…) the work is entirely different with intellectually impaired parents of three deeply handicapped children (...) work here is basically, as I said, more like leading by the hand and helping in many things such as – medical examinations, school selection, contact with the school, offices, repayment of debts, value of money, management.

> These are the basic things that you do, but really here and now with the given family.
>
> Female family assistant (N10): as I say, I have the majority of families with intellectual disabilities, so it is also like completely different work with them, because they just need to be shown step by step. They cannot be assigned tasks because they just will not do it.

According to the family assistants, *leading by the hand* was a variant of activity tailored to the capabilities of the families. The family assistants pointed out that not everyone wants and can speak for themselves, get involved in the process of co-ordinating the designed aid plan, and negotiate.

It is worth adding that family assistants are in a somewhat paradoxical situation, because due to the limitations of some families, they are sometimes unable to provide support that meets the requirements of participatory practice, which is a formal and legal requirement. The already mentioned *Ustawa z dnia 9 czerwca 2011 roku o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/Act on Supporting Family and the Foster Care System*, which regulates the profession of family assistant in the Polish social welfare system, states that "supporting the family is carried out with its consent and active participation" (2011: Art. 8, Par. 3).

The family assistants' narratives indicate that the realities of their work differ from the statutory requirements. The assistants are assigned to families who, in their opinion, are unable to cooperate based on active participation. This is happening as part of a wider trend related to the increasing number of families supported by caseworkers (Levin, Weiss-Gal, 2009: 196).[5]

In summary, the participation of assistants within this line of activity consists in giving orders and taking over initiative for actions. Expectations and implemented activity of family members, which is a response to the activities of assistants, consists in executing commands and submission – compliance.

Targeting for independent activity

The family assistants also sought to involve family members in the support process based on the principle of expanding the field of independent activity. They took such an orientation of activity when they categorized family members as persons "having an intellect that is within the intellectual norm, capable of self-reflection and independent activity".

[5] According to the report of the Supreme Audit Office, in the period 2012–2014 the number of families benefiting from the support of the social assistance system and the assistance of caseworkers equaled 25% (*Funkcjonowanie asystentów rodziny w świetle ustawy o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej/Functioning of family assistants in the light of the Act on supporting family and the foster care system*, 2014: 17).

In order to mobilize family members to be independent in accomplishing tasks, family assistants formulated certain requirements and determined the boundaries of their caring presence. They tried to minimize taking over the initiative in the implementation of individual activities, in favour of increasing the independent activity of family members. In addition, they sought to ensure that the family took the initiative and responsibility for the activity undertaken related to the change process.

This line of activity is illustrated by the following fragment of the narrative.

Line of activity – targeting for independent activity

[The phase of internal questions]
Researcher: and I have another question (.) because in addition to such work with people with disabilities, you still work with people within the intellectual norm (.) and then what kind of support is this?
Female family assistant (N4): well, if there are offices to attend, then once I can go together with them, for treatment, or so on. Well, but I also require self-reliance from them, it is not like with the intellectually impaired, it is completely different. We set ourselves a goal, what they are to do and that's it. On this principle. Not by the hand, once yes, I can go, but the initiative must rather come from them, because they have to learn life. Because it is known that no assistant will be there for a very long time, so – it may not sound nice – but I bring them to heel to get over and take their fate into their own hands. If there are no mental barriers.
Researcher: is it just that you try to shake them a little?
Female family assistant (N4): yes, the shock method of course. Show the dangers that children can be taken, and this is probably the worst thing that could happen to them. I'm talking about my families, so yeah, the shock method. Make them aware of certain things for which they are responsible.

The above fragment of the narrative indicates that the family assistant mobilized family members to independent activity by means of methods that could be considered authoritarian, such as putting parents in a situation of challenge to which they needed to respond "here and now" and applying *the shock method* consisting in confronting family members with probable negative consequences of their behaviour involving placement of a child/ children in a substitute care facility in the event of neglecting to perform certain activities.

Ian Dempsey and Carl Dunst (2004) claim that empowering practice should contain support designed to encourage critical reflection by the help-seeker, as well as the development of knowledge and practical skills (Ibid.: 41).From this perspective, the analyzed line of activity can be seen as a manifestation of striving to empower parents by strengthening their perception of themselves as the persons responsible for the change process (Ibid.: 41).

The use of more or less authoritarian ways of influence is a debatable issue since it may not necessarily contribute to the construction of a partnership-based relationship. According to Peter Beresford, Suzy Croft

and Lesley Adshead who analyzed the needs of service users of palliative care social work, partner relationship is one of the key elements of perceived support, which emphasizes the display of understanding, sensitivity and empathy (2008: 1393–1396). On the other hand, Andrew Turnell points out that a partnership-based relationship is sometimes perceived as founded on the sincerity of a social worker, who expresses, simply and directly, his or her ability to exercise power, which does not mean that he or she is in fact seeking a paternal relationship (1998: 3). Such behaviour can be a way of making parents aware of what they are actually participating in and what they are striving for (Ibid.).

As part of this line of activity, assistants stimulate family members to begin independent activity and take initiatives in the decision-making process. Sometimes clients need to overcome the resistance to independence that assistants try to overcome by using more authoritarian ways of interacting. It can be an obstacle in establishing a partner relationship that is important in a participatory approach in social work.

Stimulation to self-reflection

Conversations about the family's biographical experiences and things that happened to it are described in the narratives of some family assistants (N3, N8) as separate lines of activity, intentionally directed at stimulating family members to take self-reflection. The assistants engaged family members in discussions about the problems they experienced, which sometimes transformed into their life stories.

This type of activity was addressed to people categorized as capable of making self-reflection that were sometimes unaware of many of the causes of their problems. Some family members avoided difficult topics and were opposed to starting working on themselves.

The stimulation to reflect on oneself takes on particular meaning after breakthrough events that constitute "the turning points" (Strauss, 2008 [1959]: 95–102) in the life of the family, such as losing children who are placed in a foster care institution, taking a detoxification treatment, etc.

The following excerpts from the narrative are an example of this activity.

Line of activity – stimulating reflection on oneself

Female family assistant (N8): Because I basically lead her through the "Happy Return" therapy (the assistant visited a woman during the period when she took part in a therapeutic and educational programme for families applying for the return of children from foster care institutions) in the centre for which she signed up. Some kind of educative training. All the time talking about problems, about drinking that ruined her family, about her experiences as she was alone with the child, what kind of family she

had, the support she has from her family. In fact, during all the three months that have passed, in the various crises she has, I accompany her with some success. She feels how I talked to her, what's important.

Female family assistant (N3): (...) I see if it is so that what the family says to me, what it expects, is more in line with what I see, or if, in my opinion, there is something to improve in a sphere where the family does not realize, maybe where it is unaware. Well, we are trying to complement each other's awareness and somehow I always try to talk about what I see and what I think and we discuss it.

Conversations aimed at stimulating family members to reflect had two essential functions. First, they served the purpose of providing the emotional support which the assistant manifested during listening by showing his or her acceptance. Second, they gave him or her access to the service users' knowledge. Such knowledge reveals the lifeworld (original: 'liebenswelt') through the prism of which family members give meaning to their life experiences (Kamińska, 2012).

The family assistants encouraged families to take reflection in different ways. One assistant (N8) gave family members various "homework tasks" consisting of formulating questions to be thought about in solitude. By asking questions she tried to induce self-reflection concerning, for example, the history of *drinking* and parenting as indicated below.

Homework

Female family assistant (N8): I give her various homework, for example, I ask her three questions, to which she does not necessarily have to write a written answer, but which she has to answer first of all for herself, concerning the needs of children, what was happening once, negligence resulting from her drinking.

The female family assistant (N3) shared with the family members her thoughts on their lives. Then she talked to them based on the presented interpretation, which – in her opinion involved *making them aware* of what they *had not realized* before. The following quote illustrates the activity of the assistant.

Making aware

Female family assistant (N3): I think that here in our work it is also often so that several problems overlap and we somehow try to show what it does, how it does (.) indicate what it will do in the future (.) show what it has done so far (...) well, I'm not hiding that I'm interested in where it all comes from and I try to bring it to light (.) to realize and to change, if possible (.) it is not possible, it is not possible (.) but maybe it is (...) sometimes it is possible to refer to a specialist (...) and in such situations these people hear for the first time that it has some impact on their lives and somehow/we are also working on it (…).

Some female family assistants (N3, N8) undoubtedly prompted service users to take up self-reflection that could act as an empowering trigger. Self-reflection is an expression of biographical work involving interpretation

and redefinition of one's own life experiences, which in turn can bring about a change in the current orientation of life (Riemann, Schütze, 1991: 339). On the other hand, the assistants took over control over the reflection, creating their own interpretations and directing the reflection.

The assistants' narratives encourage considerations regarding the challenges and limitations that result from the application of one of the key premises of participatory practice as regards treating service users as experts in the area of their own problems (*Family Involvement in Public Welfare Driven Systems of Care*, 2008: 2). It is worth considering this issue taking into account the realities of child protection practice including, inter alia, the specificity of individual capabilities of family members.

Assistants within the discussed line of activity tried to induce a self-reflection in family members who were not always ready for it. Sometimes assistants, in order to stimulate service users' self-reflection, tried to convey their own interpretations of family problems and to direct their reflection, which in some cases, could paradoxically limit family members' ideas.

Learning together

> Family assistant (N2): it's more about just treating people,
> listening to them, respect to them yes,
> so such community-such a partner relationship yes.

This line of activity consisted in encouraging the involvement of family members in solving problems by initiating situations of mutual learning. The assistant who described this line of activity in his narrative did not categorize parents to whom it was matched. The narrative of this assistant shows that learning together was a trend of activity that characterized his style of action. The following fragment of the narration is an exemplification of the discussed activity.

Line of activity – *learning together*

> Male family assistant (N2): (…) I just do not put myself somewhere higher than these people, because I think that really a lot of harm happened to them and they have a lot more difficulties, but also enriching experiences, which I can really draw from, so I often learn being with these families, together with them. So I show them that I cannot do different things, I do not have the skills and I do not know, but I show that you can learn different things. You can find answers to various questions, arrange various things when it comes to official matters and how to communicate with your child.

It should be emphasized that the described activity contained specific attributes of the partner relationship characteristic of the practice of participatory social work such as:

- striving to minimize power differentials in mutual contact (Turnell, 1998: 3);
- building contact based on listening to parents (Beresford, et al., 2008: 1397) and showing them respect (Beresford, Croft, 2001: 305; Healy, 1998: 900);
- stimulating active participation in the process of activity, making independent decisions (Healy, 1998: 900);
- implementation of specific tasks based on the model of cooperation (Healy, 1998: 900; Shemmings D., Shemmings Y., 1995).

The above-mentioned attributes of the partner relationship were revealed in the process of activity. The assistant built up the situational identity of the one who does not know. He resigned from the position of an expert in order to become a person who reveals his limited knowledge to the family and at the same time initiates the activity of searching for answers, which serves to indicate the ways of finding solutions. The family assistant emphasized that he "learns when working with the families and together with them". He presented family members as equal partners, from whom he can acquire knowledge.

From the perspective of this family assistant, watching the efforts that he puts in finding a solution to the problem, or searching for solutions together, encouraged parents to *overcome difficulties* themselves. This activity is illustrated in the following passage.

Encouragement to overcome difficulties oneself

[The phase of internal questions]
Male family assistant (N2): I often learn with them, I also show them. For me it is often difficult, too, so they see it too and it allows them to overcome their various difficulties not only my own but also theirs. Because, however, things are done together
Researcher: did I understand correctly, because you show them that you cannot do something yourself, but that you learn it, you are able to bear this effort, you also motivate them with your example to this
Male family assistant (N2): exactly, sure
Researcher: I understand.

It can be said that this line of activity was carried out in an atmosphere of mutual learning, community and avoiding confrontation and directiveness.

This line of activity contains the most attributes of a participatory approach to social work. In order for this kind of activity to occur, a specific attitude of a practicioner who gives up the status of an expert is necessary. On the other hand, supported people should join the process of activity on the basis of partnership, which requires them to overcome various types of internal barriers.

Limitations of participatory approach – conclusions

The aim of the chapter was to highlight certain types of participation of assistants and family members in the process of activity that takes place in the field of child protection practice. Analysis of the narratives of assistants allows us to understand their point of view regarding the possibility of participation in the process of activity, which is revealed against the background of barriers and limitations present in their daily practice. The limitations included in the description of the daily activities of assistants allows us to understand difficulties in applying the participatory approach in child protection practice.

According to the assistants, the majority of restrictions result from serious deficits in emotional and social functioning that are visible in the activity of parents towards themselves and their children (see e.g.: Healy, 1998: 902; Polansky et al., 1979: 152). Personal and social deprivation, which characterizes family members, makes it impossible for them to co-create relationships with the assistants based on an equal footing (Healy, 1998: 902).

Discussion

It should also be taken into account that there is a discrepancy between theoretical approaches related to participatory practice and its actual course in a specific field of activity (Healy, 1998: 903). I would like to draw special attention to the postulate of non-judgmentalism (Biestek, 1961), which is raised in the context of participatory practice. The advocates of this approach criticize the tendency of practitioners to take the position of an expert in the process of constructing information, who as a representative of the middle class imposes his or her own system of values and beliefs on the service users (Healy, 1998: 903; Calder, 1995: 752). As shown by the assistants' narratives, categorizing families and their assessment make an indispensable element of the activity process, without which it is not possible to make decisions related to adapting support to the specificity of problems that particular family members are struggling with (Healy, 1998: 910; Stevenson, 1996: 15). As Karen Healy (1998) rightly notes, for the participatory practice to be tailored to specific users, it must be based on categorizations containing assessments. Nevertheless, it is important that the practitioners reflect on how these categorizations emerge, what knowledge they are based on and what purposes they serve (Ibid.: 907–911).

It is about honest reflection of practitioners associated not so much with the declarative determination of their own practice as participatory, but

with the construction of a discourse unmasking the realities inscribed in a given field of activity. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the postulates of the participatory approach within child protection practice (Healy, 1998: 906–909). This can be achieved by allowing both parties to speak – the practitioners and the users embedded in specific contextual conditions, struggling with specific difficulties and barriers regarding the flow of power in mutual relations.

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Doing Participatory Action Research: **Reflections on Criticality and Social Justice** from the Researchers' Perspective

Abstract

This chapter explores Participatory Action Research (PAR) from the perspective of researchers who have applied PAR practises in two projects in the United Kingdom which are offered here as case studies. The first case study is a PAR based project which contemplates PAR by utilising the concept of "talking" as an activity for co-constructing knowledge about how young people who self-harm could be better helped when visiting their General Practitioners (GPs). The second is a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP), funded to improve a UK local authority's children's service and participation of children and young people in service design and delivery. Each case study is written and reflected upon by an individual contributor to this chapter.

The chapter outlines what participatory action research is and advocates why PAR is valuable for Social Work. Case studies are then introduced and critically discussed leading to the authors' critical self-reflections and concluding comments.

Introduction

This chapter introduces and defines Participatory Action Research (PAR). Two case-studies using PAR are then discussed. The first is "talking" to co-construct knowledge about young people who self-harm. The second is improvement in participation of young people in local authority services. The case-studies add to the understanding of PAR and its efficacy for social work. Critical self-reflection on the process and application of PAR concludes the chapter.

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What is participatory action research?

The benefits of PAR are significant. The use of PAR as an inclusive, empowering and authentic methodological focus has been the feature of recent work on secure estates and self-harm amongst female prison populations (Ward, Bailey, 2011; 2012; 2013). PAR is part of a growing trend of action orientated research in social science and education (Greenwood, Levin, 2005).

Participatory action research is an orientation to research and research events that works with individuals, groups and stakeholders as communities that each hold respective knowledge and/or experience. As the titular acronym suggests, the focus is on participation and action to draw from said knowledge/experience to create a shared, new knowledge and/or experience. PAR seeks therefore, not only to understand the world but to change it collaboratively and reflexively: "Communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers" (Reason, Bradbury, 2008: 1). The appeal of PAR is the democratic nature and orientation of the approach that borders on activism, and contrasts with any positivist world-view of disinterested and disengaged researchers. The replicability of findings is replaced with the authenticity of the collective co-construction of the research and the co-production of knowledge that derives from this process. Co-production as a concept in and of itself has similar roots to PAR in its connection with civil rights and social action in the US (Realpe, Wallace, 2010). PAR thus has a pluralistic orientation to knowledge making and social change by using sense-checking and meaning-making within a group of interested stakeholders using democratic processes.

The history of PAR develops with Kurt Lewin and the Tavistock Institute in the 1940s to develop a psychosociology (Lewin, 1947). K. Lewin's (1947) process is built on participation, action and critical reflection. It recovers human agency and includes a critical action-orientated understanding of society, communities and issues that need to be addressed. As a principled action, PAR is about bringing about change through applied research. PAR also contributes to the theory base of practice as "there is nothing as practical as good theory" (Lewin, 1952: 169). K. Lewin's (1952) message was twofold: theorists should try to provide new ideas for understanding or conceptualizing a (problematic) situation, ideas which may suggest potentially fruitful new avenues of dealing with that situation. Conversely, applied researchers should provide theorists with key information and facts relevant to solving a practical problem, facts that need to be conceptualized in a detailed and coherent

manner. More generally, theorists should strive to create theories that can be used to solve social or practical problems, and practitioners and applied researchers should make use of available scientific theory (Lens, 1987; Sarason, 1978). The application of theory is not in question but what is, is the expulsion of theory from research and the need for PAR to have an emancipatory theory of change.

William Whyte (1991) makes a case for participatory action research (PAR) as a powerful strategy to advance both science and practice. PAR involves practitioners in the research process from the initial design of the project through data gathering and analysis to final conclusions and actions arising out of the research. PAR thus evolves out of three streams of intellectual development and action:

– social research methodology;
– participation in decision making by low-ranking people in organizations and communities;
– sociotechnical systems thinking regarding organisational behaviour.

W. Whyte (1991) explores the development and implementation of participatory ideas and practices in both industry and agriculture.

The reach of PAR is from Paulo Freire's work and active and critical forms of pedagogy, indigenous people's research, the Civil rights movements, and South Asian movements. Hall (1992) charts its development from the margins of social research to the centre of attempts to promote social justice and challenges the inequalities in knowledge production. It borders on the "sociology of intervention" (Touraine, 1981).

PAR as a methodological process is where the researcher seeks to address or improve identified and self-defined areas of need through action and intervention involving those who are part of the research process (Reason, Bradbury, 2008). At its most successful it satisfies Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation with high degrees of citizen control so what the researcher must prepare for is their own "changed" view and experience as a result of the participation and influence of interested others. PAR has been used at an organisational level (Eikeland, 2012), led to literature reviews (Dick, 2010; 2011) and PAR has become "central" (Hall, 1992) and diverse (Cassell, Johnson, 2006).

The strength of PAR is that it is inclusive, democratic, pluralist, critical, and contributes to and has a value base of social justice (Thompson, 2017), so there is a clear rationale for this methodological choice in research that seeks to answer research questions such as how can practice be improved. It also provides an overarching set of principles that are consistent with empowering Social Work and supportive practice. PAR uses a cyclical process of planning, action and critical reflection, with stakeholders at the centre (O'Brien, 1998; Wadsworth, 1998).

Schema 1. The Participatory Action Research cycle

Source: Adapted from Bailey, Wright, Kemp (2015)

The benefits and strengths of PAR, its inclusivity, democratic nature, pluralism, criticality, activism and potential for co-production warrant its inclusion in the pantheon of epistemological methodologies. Participatory Action Research as a social process exploring the realms of the social and the individual, its participatory nature, is collaborative, practical and emancipatory, critical and recursive (reflexive and dialectical) to transform both theory and practice. The challenge PAR presents is the successful resolution of the power relations involved in research, the degree of contribution PAR makes to social practice and the involvement of participants.

Why participatory action research is suited to social work

PAR is a dialectical process involving action and reflection with the political goal of social transformation (Bain, Payne, 2015). It interweaves knowledge, action and reflection and truths that are partial and socially constructed (Wright, 2010). PAR takes lived experience as its starting point – knowledge from below (Cahill, 2007) – and builds power with social groups to enact transformation (Gatenby, Humphries, 2000).

According to its international definition (BASW, 2014):

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

Thus Karen Healy (2001) argues that there is considerable convergence between PAR and many contemporary Social Work approaches, particularly progressive ones. PAR and Social Work are conscious of the inseparability

of processes and outcomes, raising critical awareness of oppressed people, and encourage collective responses to social disadvantage. PAR is consistent with Social Work principles that advocate social justice with service users. As Reason (1994: 334) acknowledges: “paradoxically, many PAR projects could not occur without the initiative of someone with time, skill and commitment, someone who will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged and educated group. PAR appears to sit uneasily with this”.

This paradox in the contextualisation of where and how power manifests in PAR can downplay the role of research workers in initiating, organizing and completing PAR projects. These less apparent dynamics also offer opportunities for reflexivity. The cross-cultural methodology and applicability also present challenges. For example, the emphasis on conflict can debase appropriate change strategies, there can be resistance to change, and does not fit with the cultural values of certain indigenous communities.

We now illustrate these particular challenges of power in our first case study.

Case study 1: Talk About Self Harm (TASH)

The following case study is a Participatory Action Research based project which contemplates PAR by utilising the concept of “talking” as a structure for consideration of implementation of the PAR theoretical paradigm.

Talk About Self Harm (TASH) was a time-limited scoping project designed with the aim of improving the help seeking experiences of young people accessing primary care for support for self-harming behaviours. As the titular acronym signals, a focus of the project was the action of “talking” about self-harm. In the following overview of the project TASH is explored as a case study of PAR in practise, using the lens of “talking” as a guiding thread to critique the application of PAR as a research method.

The focus on the role of talking takes inspiration from Thompson and Pascal’s approach to critically reflective practice which encompasses “take[ing] greater account of the central role of language, meaning and narrative as key elements in the process of meaning making” as a strategy to provide a basis for reflective practice to work towards emancipatory practice (Thompson, Pascal, 2012: 322). The rationale for focusing on the role of talking is that although the TASH project comprised three workpackages these were interlinked by the common thread of talking. Talking about self-harm occurred in specific stakeholder groups including GPs, practice nurses, a young person’s advisory group, and young people using GP surgeries, yet rarely were “talked about experiences” shared

between stakeholders largely due to the topic of self-harm being emotive and reflective of a highly personalised behaviour.

The spatial context in which PAR to talk about self-harm took place was in three GP Practices in the UK as sites of the particular focus of this research project. TASH aimed to use a PAR approach to engage with and listen to the experiences of stakeholders, particularly young people, GPs and practice nurses. Significant strands of the project reflected the cyclical process of PAR:

- Planning – Understand the experiences of primary care staff providing healthcare interventions to young people who self-harm and the barriers and support systems young people experience when accessing primary care for support;
- Action – Co-produce with relevant stakeholders, self-help/self-management materials for use in primary care settings;
- Action – Conduct training/coaching interventions with primary care staff to support the use of self-help/self-management materials in the primary care setting with young people who self-harm;
- Critical Reflection – Identify the barriers and support systems to using self-help/self-management materials within a primary care setting;
- Critical Reflection – Identify the barriers and support systems when using PAR as a research methodology in primary care settings with young people who self-harm.

Stakeholders were identified through the iterative process of assembling the project and included representatives from the third sector, GP Practice Managers, GPs with a specialist interest in self-harm, and local care commissioners. A steering group was established which later was to become one of the primary sites for each phase of the PAR cycle to unfold. An informal advisory group facilitated access to young people representative of the demographic TASH sought to support. This group became a young people's advisory group for the project. The lead researcher met with these young people at intervals throughout the project to develop research instruments, such as designing the participant information sheets and consent forms, posters used for recruiting young people to participate in focus groups and interviews, and advising on the content of focus groups and interviews. Their initial involvement with the project resulted in settling on the name "Talk About Self Harm", or "TASH", for the project's identity. The ongoing involvement of the young people's advisory group guided work on the development of self-help materials which would be delivered to GP practices, and created a blog detailing sources of self-help for self-harm (TASH, 2014). The young people's advisory group could be considered the most successful aspect of the project in terms of generating "talking" about self-harm.

Exploration of barriers to these processes of talking provides a way to critique the role of PAR in this project. It is instructive to consider talking firstly as a key function of the project, the "talking" aspect of Talk About Self Harm. In this way there are two forms of talking: the specific content of talk focusing on self-harm and experiences of seeking/receiving/giving help which is the purpose of the project, and the role of talking as an instrumentalist activity necessary to propel the project forwards. In the first instance a key challenge of TASH is the considerable stigma surrounding self-harm despite the practice of self-harm amongst adolescents being comparatively commonplace (Moran et al., 2012; Morey et al., 2008; O'Connor et al., 2009) and being well-understood for at least two decades as Strong's (2000) insightful account of self-harm testifies. This paradox between the well-established understanding of self-harm and the perceived difficulties of communication and treatment of self-harm as articulated in the healthcare literature (Flessner et al., 2007; Harris, Roberts, 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Loveridge, 2013; Milner et al., 2015) is suggestive of an intriguing gap in the discourses surrounding self-harm, in other words, the way self-harm is talked about and therefore (mis)understood. The barrier created by the sometimes perceived and sometimes actual stigma of "talking" about self-harm can be considered as a barrier between the at least two spheres of discourse circulating the practise and treatment of self-harm. A simple modelling of these discursive spheres might usefully represent them as

– the cultural (Clarke, Whittaker, 1998; Strong, 2000; Baker, Brown, 2016);
– healthcare-orientated.

Whilst the healthcare-orientated sphere clearly operates within its own culture of healthcare, the dialectic between the two spheres helps to articulate a number of barriers to communication which may initially appear to arise from and be attributed to stigma.

In the TASH project the young people who together formed the young people's advisory group emerge as being more able than the healthcare professionals to talk about self-harm in the abstract and in terms of their own experiences. Interestingly, in correspondence to an editorial by Bailey, Wright and Kemp (2017) in the *British Journal of General Practice* which reflects the TASH project, Roberts (2017) states that "[…] the development of the adolescent brain means a depleted lexicon until the second decade hence adolescents appearing as 'poor' communicators", focuses on the language function as it relates to self-harm. The articulate dialogue between the lead researcher and the young people's advisory group, and Roberts' reflection on language and its relation to self-harm in adolescents, construes an important link between self-harm and language. After all, self-harm should be understood as a form of communicating distress to self and

others. In light of conversations with the young people's advisory group it was interesting to find that the primary care staff providing healthcare interventions to young people who self-harm articulated to the research team their general reticence to talk with young people about their self-harm. Various rationales were provided for this reluctance, amongst which fear of consequences occurred frequently. The discrepancy between the young peoples' and the professionals' approaches to talking can be ascribed to the roles of each group; the young people are discussing their own experiences, and the healthcare professionals are speaking from the position of – albeit briefly – encountering the effects of another's pain. Each orientation to the act of self-harm attributes the responsibility for the consequences of self-harm very differently. When put into dialogue with one another, theoretically, the young person presenting with self-harm has already "talked" about self-harm through

– attending their GP surgery;
– possibly presenting with injuries resulting from self-harm.

Reluctance by healthcare staff to talk about self-harm with the presenting young person is a barrier initially arising from the stigma surrounding self-harm and which is clearly articulated across many domains of the healthcare literature. In other words, the barrier to talking about self-harm is, here, a structural one which is reinforced by professional discourses.

This close reading of the role of talking as applied in the practice, or "action", cycle of PAR in the TASH project points towards similar structural barriers to the instrumental forms of talking necessary to frame and conduct the project. The "planning" and "critical reflection" phases of the PAR cycle were iterative and in practice scheduled into the Steering Group meetings which took place at regular intervals to structure the project. The differing discursive spheres members of the steering group operated within as part of their professional roles and quite probably also through any personal experience of self-harm meant that the group comprised representatives some of whom were based primarily in the cultural sphere of discourses around self-harm, and others who predominantly worked from the healthcare sphere of discourses. In the context of a steering group whose Chair primarily approached the project from the perspective of a healthcare professional, it was unsurprising that the healthcare sphere of discourse dominated discussions and therefore the direction the TASH project would take as it unfolded. The cultural domain was largely silenced, emerging primarily in the 'action' phase when the young people talked about their direct experiences. This suggests that perhaps the discourses of healthcare which, by definition, problematise self-harm as a behaviour which requires "treatment", can act as a significant barrier to talking. Drawing on Maggie Nelson's assertion, "But why bother with diagnosis at all, if a diagnosis is but a restatement of the problem?"

(2009: 12) the barrier to talking may lie in that which is talked about; the "naming" of self-harm names a symptom not a diagnosis but easily slides into becoming the problem at the point of receiving treatment. Gathering around the table at Steering Group meetings the difficulties arising through the differences between the cultural and healthcare spheres of discourse, which manifested in practice as differing ways of talking about self-harm, the very focus of the project, became over time a barrier to engagement. Time and resource constraints in terms of attendance at meetings focused around reflection with minimal discernible action emerging from those reflections resulted in diminishing temporal and spatial resource allocation from stakeholders. PAR depends upon the uptake of those involved at all levels of the project and inevitably, without their investment, the PAR cycle naturally atrophies. The talking so vital to the PAR cycle fades to silence without attendance. There is less talking and less listening.

In the case of the TASH project it was heartening that the primary group of people for whom the project was targeted i.e. young people were indeed the group with the most enduring engagement with the project. One tangible outcome from the project was a short conversation guide for practice nurses to follow when talking with a young person about self-harm in a time limited conversation. The guide came directly from what young people characterised as helpful "talking" and was developed in response to a direct ask from practice nurses who took part in the project. As considered elsewhere (Bailey, Wright, Kemp, 2015: 26) it may be that this project is an instance of PAR working most effectively for a "captive audience", although how this fits with the emancipatory ambitions of PAR is less clear. As TASH drew to its conclusion Reason's acknowledgement that "paradoxically, many PAR projects could not occur without the initiative of someone with time, skill and commitment, someone who will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged and educated group. PAR appears to sit uneasily with this" (1994: 334) fits with the experience of the final Steering Group meetings which comprised the academics and practice staff from non-frontline roles guiding the project.

The ambitions of talking in Talk About Self Harm and the PAR approach to research appear at first view to be sympathetic towards one another. Both contain emancipatory aims. In practice, structural barriers to talking in the form of communicative discourses and temporal and spatial resources to take part in talking required that the researchers revisit their expectations about the limitations and the successfulness of PAR in this project and learn from this in terms of ambitions for similar research endeavours in future.

Case study 2: knowledge transfer partnership

The context of the second case study is a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) between a University and a local authority part funded by a local authority and the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) to improve the effectiveness of Early Help Services for children and young people in a specified geographical area. Participatory action research was used to generate evidence-based practice and improve outcomes for this service user group. The aims of the KTP were to inform service re-design that would provide a more robust evidence base to the delivery of programmes and provide frameworks to enhance practice.

The purpose of the knowledge exchange between an academic partner and a social work provider was to:

- inform the development of the Family Service to deliver support in a more timely and streamlined way for the most vulnerable families;
- provide the local authority with a more co-ordinated, evidence-based approach to the commissioning and delivery of parenting programmes;
- provide the local authority with a developed, over-arching evaluative framework that all services can use to support critical thinking, data management and data analysis.

Participatory action research was used to involve children and young people in the process of knowledge exchange. Priscilla Alderson (2005: 29–30) suggests there are three levels of children and young people's involvement in research.

- Children as unknowing subjects of research. Where children do not know that research is being carried out and are not asked for their consent;
- Children as aware subjects. Here the design of the research is tightly within control of the adult researcher;
- Children as active participants. Here there is flexibility over the methods used in the research and children themselves become involved in planning and carry out research projects.

Priscilla Alderson (2005) suggests each level implies a different degree of conception of childhood from seeing the child as innocent, needing control, or confident and competent individuals. As part of the participatory element of PAR, the children were engaged as competent and confident individuals with genuine and authentic needs that could help to inform services provided by the local authority. This follows Groundwater-Smith et al. (2015: 70) who recommend that research needs to be "relevant, meaningful and interesting" and engages children and young people as "active, informed and informing agents".

Through the PAR process the researchers sought to reflect what Harry Shier (2001) argues are five levels of participation:

– children are listened to;
– children are supported in expressing their views;
– children's views are taken into account;
– children are involved in decision-making processes;
– children share power and responsibility for decision making.

The openings of PAR, in this instance, are founded on a statement of intent and commitment to research in a certain way which requires resources such as time, skills and knowledge to be shared between the academic and practice partners. Obligation in this instance of PAR is when an organisation agrees a policy that young people should operate at this level.

The first phase in the PAR process (planning) was to address the ethical issues and to make them as transparent as possible to the University's ethics committee, the researchers, the local authority, key stakeholders, and children and young people. The next stage in the process was to alert managers across the local authority to the intentions for PAR. A memo of understanding was circulated to negotiate access and encourage participation from key stakeholders.

As part of the planning stage of the PAR cycle the research team approached established fora of representation such as Children's Trust Boards. Opinions from representatives (adults, children and young people) were gathered albeit limited to the methods that children and young people would find valuable such as taking photographs. Such an approach reflects Donaldson (1979) who suggests activity needs to be meaningful to children and young people, to have a purpose and to have value to them, and Hatch (1995) who emphasises the need to establish a rapport with young people in research and to make them feel comfortable. There was a moderate reception from practitioners and acknowledgement of participation and a desire to participate. On review, the engagement and participation of these children and young people was luke warm with nominal commitments to continue participation.

A final plan that was put in place was to garner involvement of young people in the project through schools using activities that had been suggested from the previous engagement with children and young people at the Children's Trust Board. With a thoroughly thought through set of methods that children and young people would find engaging, PAR was put in place across different schools from primary to secondary schools. Although modest in scale (in total three schools were involved), the activity and value with the children and young people was simple but profound. Working with the children and young people their ideas and wishes were included in the activities and levels of engagement were negotiated. Having

reviewed the ethics, principal managers and existing fora for children and young people, the existing access arrangements through schools was decided upon.

For each phase of the PAR cycle, activities were planned then put into action and a review/reflection of each session with children and young people was conducted. The research team planned engaging activities, took action and put them into practice, and reviewed the success, benefits and limitations of each action. Within this PAR cycle, the principles of PAR were extended to include all the children and young people. This took three forms. The first was approaching established and existing community groups for children and young people to canvass opinion on what activities would be most valued by the children and young people. On reflection, this approach suffered from a lack of clarity on roles, responsibility and purpose of the research for the pre-existing groups. The groups already had established roles and responsibilities and a purpose that was not transferable to research purposes but was orientated towards the community service provided by trusted and valued community professionals. For example, the research team participated in a community children and young peoples' group that was an established youth group providing sustenance and refreshment for those children and young people. Reviewing the participation and action, the benefit for the children and young people remained with that service and although their opinions and views were canvassed the focus was on getting a good meal and the reception of participation in the research activity was mild.

The challenge of the PAR methodology on reflection was the tension between existing groups and fora for participation. Without a thorough understanding and analysis of the context in which PAR was being enacted, the potential for the emancipatory and aspirational appeal of its participatory nature remained unfulfilled. The pre-existing groups in this project promoted a layer of experts in participation that acted as a barrier to more inclusive and encompassing participation or wider stakeholders. The values and aspirations of PAR remained laudable, the execution of PAR in this project required finessing to fully realise these values.

Critical reflections on PAR

As a stage of PAR in and of the process critical reflection remains fundamental. Neil Thompson and Jan Pascal (2012: 322) suggest critically reflective practice offers a basis for emancipatory practice that:

- incorporates issues of forethought or planning: reflection-for-practice;
- takes greater account of the central role of language, meaning and narrative as key elements in the process of meaning making;

- goes beyond individualism or 'atomism' to appreciate the significance of the wider social context;
- takes greater account of the emotional dimension of reflection;
- incorporates a greater understanding of the important role of power;
- is clear about the differences between reflection and reflexivity and understands the relationship between the two;
- takes account of time considerations, at both individual and organisational levels and, crucially;
- develops a critical approach that addresses the depth and breadth aspects of criticality and the interrelationships between the two.

As researchers being critically reflective of PAR there are distinct gains and benefits but also setbacks and disadvantages. The benefits of planning, meaning, context, emotion and power make significant contributions to individuals and organisations when using PAR as a methodology. However, a fully critical reflection on PAR involves the discursive power involved, particularly the distinction between the authentic discourses of young people and the professional discourses of health and social care professionals. The Talk About Self Harm case study suggests talking as applied to practice involves structural barriers and instrumental forms of talking between the competing discourses of young people and health professionals.

Critical participatory action research expresses a commitment to bring together broad social analysis, the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, the way language is used, organisation and power in local situations, negotiated access arrangements and action to improve things. The contextual detail and associated power dynamics need attention to address gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social class. As S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart (2000: 569) rightly suggest critical participatory action research "may be considered a 'romantic' aspiration, over-emphasing people's willingness and capacity to participate in programs of reform".

Although PAR is widely endorsed as consistent with Social Work's committment to social justice (Finn, 1994; Hicks, 1997; Mathrani, 1993; Sarri, Sarri, 1992; Sohng, 1992, 1996) the limitations of the link to social analysis, critical self-reflection of participants, the language used, the discourses exercised and the role of power limits the ability to deliver the romantic aspiration of PAR.

Central to PAR and to social work practice is the requirement to build relationships. The Knowledge and Skills Statements for Child and Family Social Work (DfE, 2018) suggests the use of effective direct work with children and families by building purposeful relationships. The statement for Adult Social Work (Department of Health, 2015) emphasises person centred practice with Social Workers working co-productively and innovatively with people, local communities, professionals, agencies to

promote self-determination, community capacity, personal and family resilience. Interestingly both statements are silent on the issue of power which is central to such relationships and fundamental to PAR as a research methodology.

Conclusion

The introduction of ideas, practices, policies and methodologies of PAR consolidates the participation of service users in Social Work research. However, the tension between levels of participation, authentic talk of service users, the power dynamics of the research itself, and the competing discourses at play in service delivery, demonstrate the potential limitations of PAR. On reflection, the context and situation of the research needs to be fully explicated, discussed, talked about and negotiated for a truly critical participatory action research process to emerge.

Sarah Banks (2012) speaks of a 'situated ethics of social justice' that takes social justice as its starting point and qualifies it by its situatedness. She provides a six-point plan:

- Radical social justice. A base line of equality of opportunities but an engagement with oppression and injustice for individuals, groups and cultures;
- Empathic solidarity. Involves abilities of critical analysis and critical thinking in the context of professional activity;
- Relational autonomy. Power as moral agents to work for 'power with' others, including service users;
- Collective responsibility for resistance - good and just practice and resisting bad practice. Autonomy is relational in the context of oppressive and constraining structures. Constructive alliances of professionals, workers, service users and sharing responsibility to promote social justice;
- Moral courage. The disposition to act in difficult, challenging and uncomfortable situations;
- Working in complexity and contradictions. Working in space of care and control, prevention and enforcement, empathy and equity.

This radical form of "situated" social justice addresses the critical and contextual detail that is needed for a critical participatory action research to be used.

The promotion of a values-based perspective through promoting social justice is a core principle for practitioners and researchers wanting to use PAR. The development of Social Work practice concerns an increasing awareness and ability to address issues of social justice, challenging structural inequalities across all social divisions, and the realisation of

human and citizenship rights. These are key issues that practitioners and social workers face in conducting PAR with and alongside service users to effectively deal with promoting social justice, talking about inequalities and realising rights.

Social justice operates as a regulatory heuristic for PAR in the values-based perspective on practice, the contribution made by practitioners and researchers using PAR enables, and the aspiration to promoting social justice.

Given the omission of power from the Knowledge and Skills statements in England and Wales, a fully critical participatory action research agenda has much to offer the practice of modern day Social Work.

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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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Part IV

Participatory Issues in the Academic Education

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Learning Together: Social Work Students and Service Users Reflect Critically on Their Diverse Life Experiences

Abstract

In this chapter, the author introduces the concept of a project week where social work students study together with a diverse group of unemployed social work clients. This involves a learning approach as a formative research process, focusing on establishing and maintaining relationships and highlights communalities. The subject matter references a public forum organized by, "aqua muehle Vorarlberg", during which students and service users present the results of their collective project week. The issues researched focus on unemployment, education, qualification, illnesses, discrimination and inclusion. A document analysis of learning journals together with records of feedback sessions and presentations of outcomes form the basis of this contribution. A series of new possibilities arise when groups form equally, leaving their "normalities" of familiar learning environments behind. The experiences are evaluated positively by the participants despite being described as exhausting, emotional and difficult. Role ambiguity contributes to a valuable experience of exchange.

Introduction

This chapter provides an example within social work education to highlight possibilities of cooperation and mutual learning strategies between social work students and social work service users while participating in a field project. This field project is organized between FH Vorarlberg (University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, Austria) and "aqua muehle Vorarlberg", a local NGO working in the field of adult education and employment.[1] The project group presents their yearly project outcome,

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[1] AQUA Mühle Vorarlberg gGmbH, Abbreviation: aqua muehle, Webpage: https://www.aqua-soziales.com/Aqua/Web/aqua.nsf/Pages/Aqua (accessed: 05.12.2017).

reflecting critically on their diverse life experiences while using a political forum to voice their ideas for a better and more inclusive future of the labour market. The research for this contribution consitutes a documentary analysis of students' reflective diaries, records of feedback sessions and presentations of outcomes within this performed project work in the years between 2009–2016. The presentation of the results within this chapter is divided into three aspects: results for social work education, results reflecting service users' input and feedback and results, analysing student's reflective diaries. At the closure, a summary with a brief outlook into further research aspects is provided.[2]

The social work education programme in Austria consists of a 3-year Bachelor degree programme due to the EU-wide harmonization within academic degrees known as the Bologna Process. In Austria this means that every federal state provides a social work degree programme at a university of applied sciences. So far, these Bachelor programmes all cover social work studies that do not involve a specialization but rather involve a generalist or holistic focus enabling their students to work within all areas of practice after graduation. This six semesters study programme leaves little time to cover all these wide range of important theoretical and practical aspects relevant for social work. Critical voices within the academic debate within the German speaking social work scene often refer to this dilemma as it hinders the process of professionalization of this young discipline (i.e. Staub-Bernasconi, 2010: 115–132). Others hold the position that the future within social work education will rely more on a two-tier system, assigning different tasks and responsibilities to graduates of Bachelor and Master programmes. This model considers Bachelor of Social Work graduates as "front line" social workers who focus on direct client work and Master of Social Work graduates more to focus on management and research tasks.

A further critique of the short Bachelor of Social Work education programmes lies within the heavy focus on knowledge reproduction or fact-based learning for exams instead of reflective action, student-based-learning processes or experimental forms of learning. Jennifer Moon provides examples of research outlining a conception of a continuum of approaches within learning strategies – from "deep" approaches stretching to "surface" approaches. She concludes that a:

> deep approach is where the intention of the learner is to understand the meaning of the material. She is willing to integrate it into her existing body of previous ideas, and understandings, reconsidering and altering her understandings if necessary. The new ideas are 'filed' carefully and integrated. In contrast, a surface approach to learning is where a learner is concerned to memorise the material for what it is, not trying to understand it in relation to previous ideas or other areas of understanding. It is as if the new ideas need to be retained for the moment, but not 'filed' for any lasting purpose (Moon, 2001: 5)

[2] Parts of this chapter are previously published in German: Böhler, 2016: 10–14.

This project week was established to engage with such a different strategy in the form of a creative learning process involving students' cooperation with service users and reaching for "deeper" and more lasting experiences of learning. This process of mutual learning, reflecting and voicing the results to a wider audience could be seen as a form of action research and learning strategy. Its focus lies on participation and action – its goals include the enrolment as change agents to social problems involving inequality issues in the wider society of Vorarlberg, Austria.

From an action research point of view, this can be considered with relation to the paradigm that knowledge production from and within cooperation of social work clients - those who are directly involved – is an important and valid form of knowledge production, combined with scientific approaches of documentation and research (Whyte, 1990). Furthermore, the focus on action implies that there is an intention for change involved which follows Kurt Lewin who strongly insisted that science develops hypotheses with proximity to praxis and with the intention for results being useful for implementing changes in society and are thus problem solving (Lewin, 1948).

Critical reflection on all levels forms a key accompaniment to this process. The importance of reflection processes is highlighted within all social work literature – within practice, education and research areas. However, within academic education, courses that practice and hence provide learning spaces for the practice of critical reflective skills are more the exception than the rule. Reflective journals combined with experimental forms of teaching/learning are one important aspect to be included within social work curricula (see further analysis, Boehler, 2015). The goal of the Bachelor degree programme of social work in Vorarlberg, Austria is to provide a knowledge based, solid and reflective learning process within these six semesters. This regular but special project week forms an important part of this goal, however small it may be in terms of the overall curricula. All involved groups are practicing strategies such as learning by doing, engaging in building working relationships while reflecting diverse stereotypes of other group members within this process.

Learning together – working together: project work between University Degree Programme and a local NGO aqua muehle

The field project began in 2009 and was developed into a regular annual event that takes place each year at about the same time on the 1st of May: Labour Day in Austria and throughout the world. The results of the project cooperation between the local social work degree programme

at the FH Vorarlberg and the NGO aqua muehle are presented at the well-attended, yearly aqua forum where about 200 workers, politicians and educators meet to discuss various ideas and concepts.

The project week has a series of clear goals that provide a framework for the collective work. The concept of cooperation on a horizontal, equal basis is encouraged in order to enable a flexible, inventive and less rigid working environment. A focus is placed on the expansion beyond normative working spaces, marking both a physical and psychological departure from the participants' comfort zones. This theme of unusual working practices is expanded to the formation of the learning and research group where a particular emphasis is placed on the personal level of reflection and relationship-building whilst cognitive knowledge takes a less dominant role in the process. Finally, various aspects relating to diversity should be highlighted including the recognition of large group heterogeneity within the categories of education, social status, age, ethnicity, life experiences, etc.

Further expectations involve an essential enthusiasm from the participants for the topic of the project that manifests itself in an active working model of learning. The concept of a holistic learning process involving "Head, Heart and Hand" provides an effective theoretical background to this process (Rummler, 2011: 54). The selection of the participants is therefore an important part of the success of the project and this has as its starting point a strong focus on voluntary participation. These initial steps to create the group include an introductory meeting with a trusted person.

Once the project is in its closing stages and the results for the presentation are being chosen and formulated there is a deliberate emphasis placed on the autonomy of the participants. The goals here are a lack of censorship and a move away from a primary focus on presentation quality. In recent years a number of highly creative presentations have been independently designed by group members including, amongst others, a series of digital stories involving audio files combined with photographical narratives and a complex collective sculpture that represented the meaning of home, identity and belonging ("Heimat-Wand").

To summarize, the project week takes place on a yearly basis. The project group consists of about 20 people: social work students, social work clients (aqua muehle), a university lecturer (FH Vorarlberg) and a field social worker (aqua muehle). The project includes a preliminary meeting, four full project days, a finalizing meeting and the presentation at the public event (aqua forum).

Methodology

This paper looks back at seven years of experiences and includes three different perspectives. The research focus for the participating students lies mainly within the document analysis of their reflective journals. The introduction and theoretical and methodological instructions on how to write these reflective journals are given to the participating students before the project week. Their main emphasis lies on the reflection of the group process and their communication strategies while working on the project. Guiding questions for their reflection involved:

- What have I learned?
- How did I feel? How do I feel now?
- What could I observe within my own communication strategies?
- What did others do?
- What will I work on improving?
- What seemed important? Unimportant? Difficult? Irritating?, etc.

These reflective learning journals are written with a clear goal to slow the pace of learning while increasing the sense of ownership. They acknowledge the role of emotion in learning and give learners an experience of dealing with unstructured material which encourages metacognition (learning about one's own process of learning) and enhances learning through the process of writing (Moon, 2005: 26). The document analysis of these journals over the last years provides a good basis for understanding some key aspects underpinning the learning processes while engaging in the field project work of designing and experiencing mutual learning processes.

The research focus for the results regarding the participating service users means that the focus lies mainly within the document analysis of diverse material used as a presentation of the results at the public event aqua forum i.e. PowerPoint presentations, photos and video presentations and the documentation of the feedback session during the project weeks involving students and service users' perspectives.

Results – for social work education

An assessment of the project week's results in terms of didactic innovation revealed a diverse range of new learning experiences for the students involved. These involved the pervading biographical and self-reflective elements of the pair introduction and the subsequent emphasis placed upon personal experiences of employment and unemployment. This was achieved through a combination of private reflection and discussions in the large group. The process of working together with

another participant to formulate open questions for an interview illustrates this interwoven learning experience. The participants were invited to reflect on the initial stage of choosing – i.e. did they actively select their working partner or were they a passive part of this process? By reversing this process in the second group exercise, the participants were not only able to consider their own active or passive roles but were also challenged to reflect and analyze the criteria they were consciously or unconsciously employing in their choice of partner. This led to a deeper speculation on how initial judgements are made during social exchanges and what motivations lie behind decisions that are made in a social context. The act of writing these thoughts in a learning journal provided a further space for the participants to deepen their understanding of their own choices and reactions. This is shown by the following text example taken from a reflective diary:

> Back in the large group Thomas Vogel asked us whether we were chosen or whether we actively chose someone. I had actively chosen D.... Now everyone who had been chosen had to become active and choose another person for an interview. I was chosen by N. I had noticed her right from the beginning of the day because of her unusual hairstyle and make-up. At the beginning I didn't find her very nice but it gave me the motivation to get to know the personality behind the pretty face.

The project week was also able to include the concept of creativity within the learning process through the participants developing artistic interpretations of the differing thematic areas being discussed. This expressive aspect of learning and interaction was of particular importance to the late former director of aqua muehle, Thomas Vogel, an important pioneer in Vorarlberg's social scene. In the Annual Report 2011 he wrote:

> It is an expression of freedom that we actively participate in creating the world we live in. In Vorarlberg people say "schaffa" and not "arbeiten" (to work). "Schaffa" means to help shape something new and bring it into creation (Vogel, 2011: 6-7).

The pictures and symbols that emerged from this artistic process were able to communicate certain themes and ideas without involving the act of verbal description, an element of the workshop that diversified the nature of the exchanges between the participants. The interpretation of these artistic works in turn inspired questions and discussion in the larger group, bringing a combination of energy, trust and emotion to the communication that was enormously positive to the learning experience whilst at the same time, on occasions, testing the boundaries of the project week. The art exhibit created in the 2015 "Heimatwand" provides a clear example of the creative potential of the participants, a process that required personal courage and a level of trust not always available to the individuals involved.

Results – reflecting service users input and feedback

For many service users the initial step in deciding to take part in such a project week was a courageous decision in itself. Merely anticipating the process ahead generated an acute sense of anxiety. One service user admitted that "I couldn't sleep for 2 days before because I was so nervous".

However, as Andreas Nuncic and Kerstin Beiter state in their report on the project week in 2014:

> Themes such as fear and insecurity are clearly apparent. The voluntary setting, the open nature of the discussions, the focus on curiosity and the high value placed on individual experience create a climate in which even the most insecure participants are empowered to contribute. (…) The insight gained into differing life perspectives is experienced by everyone as an enriching process (Beiter, Nuncic, 2014: 6).

The intensive discussions involving one's own personal identity and attitudes were further analyzed in feedback processes. A variety of diverse themes emerged with particular importance placed on the differing concepts of belonging (both the students and the service users), personal skills and talents and the effects of these on social grouping and value judgement. The following statements reflect some of these themes:

> At the beginning I was sceptical but now I would immediately participate again;
>
> I felt myself to be on the same level – there were no arrogant snobs;
>
> The collective work and the communication showed me again that we are all equal regardless of our educational levels;
>
> During these days I got to know myself in new ways;
>
> It was a valuable time, a gift to be here;
>
> I felt at home.

A final important aspect for the all the participants of the project week was the coming together again at the official aqua forum event where every year the results of the project week are presented to the public with the participants taking a prominent part on the proceedings. The experience of being on public show in such a large arena, reading out texts or recognizing their own artistic endeavours being displayed on large screens is not only a wholly new one for most participants but also a moment of great pride. A large part of this pride involves the sense of group belonging, being part of a group that has learned with each other and from each other. This is where knowledge production by service users and social work students is able to reach out and have its own voice and wider audience for social change.

Results – analysing student's reflective diaries

For the students participating in the project week the learning experience was viewed as emotional, unusual and intensive. Through their use of learning journals to enhance the process of reflection the students were able to focus on relevant themes that were a central part of the project week. The development of groups was one of these themes that was consistently referenced:

> I could feel the teamwork and the WE-feeling amongst us students and the participants sense that they are being strengthened with every day of the project week. We are constantly entering into relationships with each other, whether it is during the "teaching", in the breaks, whilst eating lunch or in the train. I think, that was the essential point.

> In terms of intercultural understanding I have learnt a lot about myself during this day. I had the feeling that we had already melted into a group by the second day.

This process of building groups with one another was regularly associated with a range of emotions and reactions, including insecurity (mirroring that of the service users), expectations, fears and a constant sense of surprise when being confronted with the unknown.

> I am proud that I could successfully engage in the process without knowing where it would lead to.

The students also made explicit references to the various didactic methods that had been experienced during the project week, noting this as an essentially different learning experience to what they had been used to up until this point.

> I could experience studying as a personal debate with a topic and not as a large pile of knowledge. I also think that this brought me a step further in developing a self-aware and professional identity.

The concept of pre-ordained social roles in a learning context was something that the project week challenged, including the personal expectations of the participants and what they were able to learn through their experience of exchange. This was clearly apparent in several honest descriptions that surfaced in the learning journals:

> What changed was my somewhat naïve understanding of what was to be expected from several days of continuous group work together with people from different life backgrounds who I have never met and – being aqua muehle clients – are completely unknown to me.

> This connection with people from aqua muehle showed me that you don't have to be a philosopher to be able to philosophize, one can say a lot without knowing the entire scientific vocabulary and one can have a lot of ideas without knowing theory.

Summary and outlook – to focus on establishing and maintaining relationships and highlight communalities

There are a series of important conclusions to be drawn from this teaching and learning experience. The reduction, wherever possible, of hierarchical relationships is an important lesson to learn through the readily apparent success of didactic strategies that move in the opposite direction; encouraging a collective learning environment in which no one feels inferior to anyone else. Working towards this general goal necessitates constant focus on the unheard voices within the group. This can be enacted through the various didactic methods of creative work and journal writing. Both contribute to the rich expression of personal experience for people who are perhaps unused to being asked to reflect or speak out in a big group of people.

Continuing with the theme of self-expression, this is further encouraged by a keen awareness of spaces where people come together to exchange. For this space to expand and flourish the learning experience requires a strong supportive structure and a conveyed sense of permission. The learning spaces should indicate that each participant is welcome, everyone arrives together in order to learn with each other. These small structural steps often deliver considerable returns in terms of the participants' potential to learn and share. The service users benefit from being made visible and having access to the public, forming relationships where communication to facilitate understanding is the core motivation of exchange. This requires a certain amount of creativity in the didactic methodology, including non-traditional formats of learning, teaching and reflection such as working with symbols, art and pictures or the use of learning journals to intensify the reflective process.

For the students of social work, the direct process-orientated group work with service users enhances their practical skills in an unusual and challenging environment where reflective work plays a natural complementary role. A further welcome side-effect is the public exposure afforded to the practice of social work, the academic course of studies and the situation of the service users involved. One of the most remarkable outcomes highlighted is the introduction of new possibilities when groups form on an equal level, leaving their "normalities" of used learning spaces, learning environments and comfort zones behind. This process is clearly challenging as it directly involves and scrutinizes the underlying value bases of all participants. Unger describes several of these aforementioned issues as central to all action research processes – i.e. social justice, environmental protection, human rights, democracy education (Unger, 2013: 1).

Even though the experiences are often described by the participants as exhausting, emotional and difficult to master the overall response tends to be highly positive. It seems to be a very valuable experience to leave the roles of "students" as well as "service user" behind for a while and experience working together as an act of mutual exchange and learning together. Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned is the need to place more focus on what individuals share with each other and less on the differences between them. This aspect of the project week was encapsulated by this extract from a student's journal:

> I happened to find out at the end where the project week was heading towards. Because of this I found it good that the audience at the aqua forum couldn't differentiate between the students and the service users. That was good!

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CREATING LINKS GROUP*

"Creating Links": The Involvement of Service Users and Carers in the Provision of Social Work Education in England

Abstract

This chapter sets out the processes and outcomes of the involvement of a group of service users and carers in the provision of social work education at the School of Health and Social Work University of Hertfordshire, England. The School was one of the first adopters of service user input into the provision of learning and teaching in social work in England. User involvement in social work services is well established in the discourse about social work services in relation to some service user groups in the UK, although its reality and extent in reality is contested, and service users and carers' meaningful involvement in social work education on a practical level is less frequently discussed. The chapter sets out the model of participation adopted and evolved over the period of existence of the group of service users and carers who chose the name, "Creating Links" for their steering committee.

Introduction

This chapter describes the involvement of a group of service users and carers in the provision of social work education at the University of Hertfordshire in England – one of the first adopters of service user input into the provision of learning and teaching in social work in England (Peake, 2007). Whilst user involvement in social work services is well established under legislation and guidance (*Care Act*, 2014; government

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agency guidance, e.g. NHS England's [2016] *Five year forward view for mental health*; *Children Act*, 1989), its reality and extent in actual usage is contested (Beresford, 2009; Ferguson, 2007), and meaningful involvement in social work education on a practical level is less frequently discussed. We explain in some detail the model of participation adopted and evolved over the period of existence of the group of service users and carers who chose the name, "Creating Links" for their steering committee. Activities of the group are democratic rather than owned by individuals, hence this chapter is written under the group name rather than under the names of the present members of the group.

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), which has a statutory duty to register professional social workers in England, and discipline them if they do not meet its standards as set out in its *Standards of Proficiency – Social Workers in England* (2017), requires social workers to:

- be able to support service users' and carers' rights to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive;
- be able to work in partnership with others, including service users and carers, and those working in other agencies and roles recognise the contribution that service users' and carers' own resources and strengths can bring to social work.

The HCPC, under its the *Standards of Education and Training for Social Work* (2009), also validates and regulates qualifying social work programmes in universities in England, and the university's key duty under these HCPC requirements are for such programmes to ensure that student social workers are able to meet all of the above mentioned *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers* when they finish successfully their programme of study. This includes the matters raised for co-production with service users and carers as set out in the paragraph above, and how this should take place in terms of the learning from and with service users and carers on their programmes.

This growing trend towards service user control and input chimes with social work's historical championing of the principle of self-determination and avoidance of dependency as well as acknowledging the truth claims of groups such as disability movements towards rights-based adoptions of principles of voice and choice in the definition of their needs and the provision of services to meet them.

In their 2 chapters in the book by Brian Littlechild and Roger Smith (2013), *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice in the Human Services: Learning to work together*, the "Creating Links" group set out important principles for developing social work education practice from their experiences.

Rationale

The rationale for the original setting up of the "Creating Links" group emerged from a series of understandings of need within the social work programme and in wider social work practice.

- Social workers were facing increased pressure in their professional lives;
- Many practitioners felt that trainee social workers were not receiving enough practical training to supplement their academic and theoretical knowledge and understanding;
- An answer was required to the demand for amplification of the service user voice in social work education to mirror similar demands in the provision of services in the field;
- It became a necessity to incorporate the experiences of service users and their carers into social work education under the direction of regulatory oversight;
- The University of Hertfordshire's Social Work department founded "Creating Links" to answer these demands;
- Initially external consultants supported "Creating Links" but very soon the group became self-sufficient with the support of a mentor in the shape of a dedicated member of the social work academic staff to facilitate meetings and advise on university procedure.

Principles

From its inception, the key principle informing the involvement of "Creating Links" has been a parity of esteem between academic and professional and user expertise. The equivalence of these forms of knowledge in social work is encapsulated in the phrase "experts by experience". Importantly, this is understood in the university to mean that service user and carer expertise is not restricted to the narrative or biographical account of each individual's life experience but, more widely, renders possible a more fundamental expertise about the nature of social work itself and its fulfilment in the knowledge, skills and values required of social workers in the field. It is this valorisation of service users and carers' expertise as equivalent to academic expertise that enables "Creating Links" to participate fully in the learning and teaching within the university and to permit them to advise on and assess students' work on placement and in the academy. We describe this in greater detail later in the chapter. A practical manifestation of this equivalence of esteem is the status of the members of the "Creating Links" group as Associate Lecturers at the university with

access to systems and training in the manner of other academic members of staff. In the same way as academics are qualified to teach social work by virtue of their academic background and professional training and experience, service users and carers are qualified to teach social work by virtue of their deep understanding of the impact of social work on the lives of members of the communities of which they are a part.

Freedom to share knowledge

Once the principle of respect for service user expertise is established, a further principle becomes available. Service user expertise becomes trustable such that the dissemination of their knowledge and understanding can be freely shared in the classroom in a similar mode to the concept of academic freedom. Service user learning and teaching need not be moderated, filtered or explained in relation to established academic knowledge. This does not mean that academic research is not included in the module curriculum, but rather that academic knowledge does not need or indeed deserve to stand as an intermediary between the knowledge claims of service users and carers and students.

Central to the inclusion of the group is the principle that their involvement should be meaningful and not tokenistic. Avoiding tokenism – that tendency to provide only the appearance of involvement while effectively withholding influence and power - can wittingly or unwittingly manifest itself where a requirement to include service users and carers is set in policy but not in the commitment of the given institution to fully integrate their voices. In such a case, service users and carers may be present but not be influential. Their involvement is consequently rendered peripheral through a combination of processes such as lack of information, lack of access to knowledge and lack of democratic decision-making power in the processes of the institution.

Decision making power and control is central to avoiding such tokenism. It is axiomatic to the work of “Creating Links” that the discussions they hold rise above a level of consultation or sharing of views and opinions, instead achieving a level of democratic control over the learning and teaching for which they are responsible. Certainly, regulatory and university policy and procedure applies to the work of “Creating Links” but not to a greater extent than that applied to academic members of the university. There is no hierarchy perceived in the status of members of “Creating Links” and other university staff and this democracy in the group is thought to foster trust and confidence in the teaching.

“Creating Links” understand that democratic and equal inclusion of service users and carers in the social work academy mirrors the desired level of meaningful participation in the co-creation of social services in the

field and fulfils the important function of modelling co-production to students in their education and training. By experiencing and witnessing academics and service users blending seamlessly in their education, it is intended that students should understand partnership with service users and carers to be their expected norm in their practice settings.

Finally, an important purpose for "Creating Links" is to enable students to experience for themselves working in partnership with service users. Students should experience the guidance and feedback of service users and carers and seeking out their opinions and ideas as part of their network of support and learning. In such a way, it is hoped to instil in students a natural propensity to seek to form partnerships with service users and carers and to take that expectation into their social work practice. Students thus learn to listen to and reflect upon service users' knowledge and strengths.

Ultimately, each of these principles rests on the relationship established within "Creating Links". A working relationship of this sort depends on trust established over time, and built on an appreciation of the skills, abilities and qualities of the members involved. It is this relationship that underpins the extension of trust to fully participate in the learning and teaching cycle.

Values

Fundamental to the integration of service users and carers is the value of mutual respect. Such respect, fundamental in traditional social work values, may be seen when applied to the relationship between practitioner and service user, and as extended to the relationship between academic and service user and student and service user educator. Such respect manifests itself in attitudes and behaviours, translating into expectations of punctuality, confidentiality and attention to the input of the service users. These behaviours are listed in a set of codified ground rules established with students at the outset of their course of study.

The members of "Creating Links" and other service users and carers are afforded the freedom to exercise their expertise – a value of non-interference in the course of their work. This value is translated into a freedom and trust for the service users and carers to advise and guide students on their practice and their academic work without need of monitoring or recourse to academic members of the university staff.

More widely, this ability to work with students; to impart knowledge, to advise and to guide without interference accords with the wider social work value of autonomy.

Confidentiality is always a feature of social work education and its presence as a value and as a skill for social work is emphasised and

stipulated throughout the course, but requires a special emphasis when it comes to the presence of service users and carers in the classroom.

Whereas academics bring to the classroom their interpretation of concepts and theory, and rarely stray into personal experience, service users and carers commence with their lived experiences and imply theoretical knowledge. Students are told that service users have the right not to answer questions if they choose and reminded of their obligations of respect to all speakers. Students inevitably become privy to highly personal data and information. In each session students will hear personal stories and accounts of people using services, and carers. These may even relate to teams, agencies, or residential units that the students may be familiar with. Confidentiality, therefore, becomes paramount to the safe keeping of service users privacy and safety. We emphasise on the importance of confidentiality, now and when the students qualify as social workers.

At the beginning of each of their sessions with "Creating Links" students sign a confidentiality statement specifying that it is expected that students treat all the information they hear in a confidential manner.

Specifically, students sign to agree to the following statements.

> Notes taken or recorded during the session should only be used to aid learning outcomes and must not be used for other purposes unless the Creating Links members have given permission.
>
> Personal information is sometimes given by people using services during their presentations. This must not be disclosed orally or in writing to anyone not directly involved to the module.
>
> Conversation between individuals attending the module should take care that they are not overheard by others who are not involved in that particular module.

These principles and values inform a model of deep integration of academic and user expertise in which service user and carer knowledge and understanding is embedded at all levels of the structure of the provision of social work education in the university from the formal processes of programme design and validation through to individual student guidance and assessment.

History and composition of "Creating Links"

Each member of "Creating Links" has experience of using social care services or caring for someone who uses services. Over time, this experience has included learning disabilities, mental health, ageing and late life, fostering and adoption, and physical disability.

Each has different skills aside from the experience of using services. Several have degree and postgraduate level education and experience of

research and previous experience of teaching. Experience of involvement at other universities adds a rounded view of the programme and an awareness of the possibilities and options available.

Values associated with agendas such as personalisation, recovery, well-being, co-production and co-creation rolled out in the sphere of public services should be mirrored and adopted in the University setting.

Service users and carers should be enabled and empowered to control and direct learning and teaching, paralleling ideals of user-control and empowerment prevalent in social work discourse.

The work of "Creating Links" with students models and enables students to work with positive diversity, since members of "Creating Links" embody conditions and disabilities that require students to make adjustments to facilitate their input.

Activities of "Creating Links"

Degree design of social work education

"Creating Links" contribute skills and personal experiences for the development of the social work education, both BSc and MSc.

Curriculum design

It is an important feature of the involvement of the "Creating Links" group that their work with the university should not be tokenistic, but meaningful and conducted in the spirit of co-creation. To this end, the service users are involved in the design of the curriculum and not just its delivery. Prior to the beginning of each academic year, "Creating Links" and academics meet to design the content and format of the modules of study in which they are involved. The accumulation of educational experience they possess means that they are able to fully participate and do not risk effective exclusion through lack of knowledge of university processes and policy and regulations. They are consequently able to design a programme of study at the appropriate level and with the necessary content both to expose students to the desired understanding of service user and carer lived experience of social work intervention and its consequences and to furnish them with the capacity to meet the required learning outcomes in the assessment. Such interweaving of academic and experiential expertise ensures that necessary service user knowledge is embedded in the social work education and not merely added on to an existing curriculum.

"Creating Links" contribution in an advisory capacity includes input on curriculum development, and programme validation and revalidation. At a wider level, the group are integrated into the very formal processes that oversee and ratify the degree programmes as a whole. As such, they are privy to and part of the strategic overview of the social work provision at the university and part of those groups and meetings that determine medium and longer term planning for graduate and postgraduate social work education as a whole. In these settings, the group are able to contribute their expert understanding of the knowledge skills and values service users and carers require social workers to demonstrate, but also an expert appreciation of the direction of social work policy at national and subnational level; for example, an ability to bring to the planning real-world experience of initiatives such as the operation of direct payments for care schemes and therefore informing the knowledge that social workers should possess.

Student recruitment

"Creating Links" also serve an important function in the process of student recruitment and admissions. Most prominently, in the interviewing of students. Members of the "Creating Links" group make up part of a panel that selects students for the BSc (Hons) Social Work and MSc Social Work programmes. They assess and mark the performance of prospective students, observing them in a group discussion and evaluating their professional leadership potential, communication skills, social work knowledge and their values. In doing so, their evaluations are not filtered or modified by academic members of staff, but are accepted as valid interpretations of the qualities required by prospective students. Sometimes, members of "Creating Links" are also asked to form part of the individual interviews that prospective students are required to have, and, again, the service users and carers' views carry equal weight with other interview panel members.

Learning and teaching

By far the most visible contribution of "Creating Links" to the learning of social work students is their input to the service user and carer-controlled module, "Collaborative working with service users and carers". Learning outcomes for the modules are as follows:

– To critically evaluate a broad range of benefits and issues resulting from user participation and partnership in the planning of services and care packages;

- To develop a detailed understanding of how service users experience social work intervention;
- To demonstrate how to engage effectively and appropriately with the experiences of service users;
- To demonstrate an understanding of the skills needed to enhance the experiences of service users in need of support.

In Week 1 of the autumn semester "Creating Links" deliver this one-week block module to the second year BSc social work students, prior to the students' first practice learning placement.

This week is organised and presented almost entirely by "Creating Links".

"Creating Links" offers the core content of this module, while other speakers are invited by "Creating Links" to cover supplementary areas. It is critical to the success of this module in cementing the principle of co-production in the minds of students that "Creating Links" are seen to be in control of the module and not merely invited to take part by academic members of staff. To this end, service users lead on the teaching with core members of "Creating Links" delivering content, supplemented by other service users and carers. Students interact and engage with the members of "Creating Links", raising questions and discussing content as they would with any other members of the teaching team. Students are encouraged to understand that service users and carers are not present merely as story tellers, not simply to gain a valuable insight into this or that person's experience, but as educators whose input represents a fundamental knowledge and understanding of the process of social work itself. Of course, students understand that the purpose of the module is to represent the process of social work from the service user perspective, but they are required to reflect on the thematic messages from the accounts of service users and carers and not isolate or marginalise the knowledge derived as belonging only to one unique experience. Occasionally, students have misunderstood that fundamental paradigm, desiring to have practitioner "professional" perspectives juxtaposed with some of those of the service user and carer lived-through messages. Working through these revealed attitudes with students can enable them to consider their own orientation towards service user and carer expertise and hence, their own future practice. Seeing co-production modelled for them in the 'ownership' of the module exercised by the members of "Creating Links" serves to dispel notions of passivity and victimhood in the lives of service users and carers. See below for specific student feedback on their changed perceptions following the teaching.

Within the *Collaborative Working with Service Users and Carers* module students are exposed to notions of collaborative and partnership working across a range of social work experiences including:

- Elderly care;
- Foster care and adoption;
- Mental health;
- Physical disability;
- Supporting adults with special needs;
- Parent & young people's perspective of the care system;
- Perspective of a male foster carer.

Variously, these viewpoints are contained in the expertise of members of "Creating Links" or are available through their contacts and networks. As such, "Creating Links" are able to draw on a knowledge base much wider than is contained in the experience of the core steering group itself. It is important that the members of "Creating Links" approach and brief these other visiting speakers rather than need to go through the contacts of academics at the university. This autonomy further emphasises the point that it is "Creating Links", not the university that directs the progress of the learning and teaching for the students. These contributions are often more vivid and powerful than can be achieved in contributions from academics. In one memorable example, the mother of a child taken into care described the development and difficulties of her relationship with and experiences of the social workers who worked on the case. Students are set reflective tasks that encourage them to move beyond a sympathetic hearing of a personal story and to generate thematic and conceptual understandings of a unifying service user perspective.

In addition to these individual contributors, a variety of service user led groups and organisations constituted to represent, empower and advocate within the health and social care system, are invited to lecture to the students. These groups have included over recent years a HIV/AIDS organisation, a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning Intersexual and Asexual advocacy and support organisation, Looked after Children organisations, and a Black mental health service user group to contribute with a presentation that offers a unique and challenging perspective on social work health care service users organisations. These contributions permit students to explore reflectively their collaborative working practices with third sector service-user led organisations and forge an understanding of their purposes, roles and contributions to communities of service users and carers as well as their possibilities in addressing the needs of individuals and their development and progression.

In addition to their links in community service user organisations, foster carer members of "Creating Links" have, in the past, invited their own foster children to give presentations on their relationships with their own social workers.

Through these diverse representations and contributions of user and carer experiences across a range of experiences of social work interventions, this module provides students with diverse examples of what is expected of them by the community when they qualify and begin their

careers as social workers and raises their awareness of what life is really like for service users.

The module focuses solely on the perspective of the service users and carers and not that of the professionals. The students have ample opportunities to hear the perspectives of practitioners on other modules and in their practice placements.

As previously mentioned, the learning and teaching provided by "Creating Links" ranges beyond a simple narrative telling of their "story", important though this is to student knowledge and understanding. The service users and carers are regarded as educators as much as exemplars of receivers of services. An example of this is orientation is an Interactive Learning session led by the members of "Creating Links" that takes place at the end of the module on Collaborative working. A note on the background of the role play is distributed to the students after students are divided into three groups. Each group will take part in one of the role plays. From each group we ask two students to volunteer as social workers and one to take notes while the others observe and contribute. All students observe the role play and are invited to comment. "Creating Links" perform role plays based on real life incidents, taking the parts they experienced in real life.

"Creating Links" avidly seek feedback and evaluation from their students. At the end of each session, students offer feedback and comment on what they have learnt. In addition at the end of the teaching programme, students comment on their experience of the module and synthesise their experiential and academic learning. Student feedback is reviewed by "Creating Links" and informs the planning of the next delivery of the teaching. In addition, formal university systems exist for eliciting student satisfaction of their teaching on the modules and these in turn feed into evaluations of teaching excellence in the school and university as a whole.

Quotes from student evaluation indicate that perceptions of service users and carers are indeed informed by the experience of learning from "Creating Links". For example:

> It was really helpful to hear real people's experiences and to hear what they thought and perceived
>
> A fantastic interactive morning…remembering to put service users at the centre of my practice
>
> I was very impressed by the service users and this will help me linking it up with my placement
>
> (…) the importance of hearing service users and allowing them to make their own decisions
>
> (…) Understanding the importance of collaborative working
>
> (…) understanding the difference between good and bad practice
>
> (…) It was an education in diversity – What amazing people!

To encourage students to synthesise their learning into a thematic rather than a concrete understanding of the lives and experiences of service users and carers, space is made available for individual reflective integration of the conceptual and theoretical material and the narrative accounts of service users and carers' lives and experiences.

The purpose of interactive learning is to help students understand how their communication can help or hinder their work with service users. It is not about solving the problem presented within the role play. Feedback and role play allows students time to think about the perspectives and experiences presented to them over the past week.

The vehicle of a role play is adopted in order to offer practical experience within a safe environment. Students develop their skills in working with: learning and physically disabled service users, service users affected by mental health issues and young service users

In addition to the role play interactive learning scenarios, "Creating Links" also devise group exercises that help to demonstrate how to maintain confidentiality. These exercises experientially involve students in how it feels to have highly personal and confidential material held (though not seen) by others.

An example of the role play scenarios that students and "Creating Links" act out together may be instructive. In this particular scenario, a child has been taken into foster care. The students begin with group work analysing the reasoning behind that decision and considering the reasons behinds the feelings and behaviours of the protagonists.

In the role play, the mother character, played by a member of "Creating Links", can demonstrate how she feels emotionally. Her attitude and her language may be challenging for the students to deal with. The child character, played by an academic, may be reluctant to share his real feelings. With sensitivity, the students have to find out how the child really feels.

During the role play the students will have been given the opportunity to discover that the mother has alcohol and drug dependency issues and is unable to meet her son's long term needs. At the same time the son loves his mother and wants to protect her.

Volunteers from the student group act as interviewing social workers, making real time decisions about which issues should be paramount and where to focus their attention.

At the end the students must draw their own conclusions about the situation. As a learning exercise and a debrief, time is devoted to role play feedback. For the volunteer interviewers, what was their experience of performing the role play and observing it? How might they do it differently next time? What issues arose? What did the students learn?

Finally, the facilitators ("Creating Links") offer their own feedback and views and facilitate peer-feedback from students.

The intention behind this interactive learning is for the students to analyse their own learning, contribute to the development of their education, learn how to focus on the best interest of the service user and how to deal with their cases in a professional manner.

We believe best practice for social workers is demonstrated much more clearly as a role play and has greater impact than the students passively listening to a story.

Over time, feedback has indicated that students value this learning exercise and the feedback is always excellent and it is clear that the students are taking the message home.

Assessment

Perhaps one of the more innovative features of the model of service user and carer involvement adopted within the university is the responsibility of "Creating Links", beginning in 2007, towards the academic assessment of the students' assignments. For the *Collaborative Working with Service Users and Carers* module, students produce, while on their practice learning placement (students are required to undertake a period of professional workplace experience under national regulation of social work education) a poster, designed with the intention of stimulating meaningful service user involvement in the operation of the organisation in which the student is embedded. The student must also submit a rationale to accompany his or her poster that explains the thinking behind the poster drawing on academic literature and knowledge. Members of "Creating Links" grade this work in accordance with pre-set grading criteria, taking into account the realism of the student's concept, the extent to which it is likely to develop service user influence over the organisation and the attention paid to barriers and constraints on service user involvement in the particular setting of the student.

Creating Links similarly undertake formative and summative assessments at first year Bachelor's degree level and at second year Masters level. With the first year undergraduate students, formative feedback is given by service users and carers in an exercise comprising two parts. Firstly, students undertake a Carer's Assessment, interviewing a member of "Creating Links" or another volunteer carer. Students are observed in their interaction with the volunteer and "Creating Links" feedback on their skills and displayed values. This exercise provides a good opportunity at an early stage of the student professional development to see how the students will work with carers to try to help improve their quality of life.

Observing the characteristics that will be important in their work, for example; empathy, professionalism and listening skills, is a key aim of this. At the same time, and towards the promotion of co-created learning, “Creating Links” always make sure that feedback from the students is also elicited. This is of the utmost importance to the group in assessing our input.

At post-graduate level, students are required to deliver a presentation, in groups, that demonstrates a critical knowledge and understanding of what helps and what hinders interprofessional and inclusionary practice with service users and carers. This presentation is assessed by members of “Creating Links” and by the module leader of the course. Again the assessment is democratic with service users’ judgements carrying equal weight with academic members of staff.

It is interesting to note that in this post-graduate learning, “Creating Links” are again explicitly teaching beyond the boundaries of relating their experiences and offering commentary on their knowledge of the importance of interagency working. “Creating Links” offer students real-life examples of the members’ experiences of dealing with different agencies.

Some of our examples are included in *A Handbook for Interprofessional Practice In The Human Services: Learning to work together*, edited by Brian Littlechild and Roger Smith (2013).

“Creating Links” have readily involved themselves in social work research activity, authoring book chapters, delivering conference papers, engaging in consultative and advisory work and taking part in international exchange activity.

Challenges and barriers

Inevitably, there have been challenges and barriers to overcome in embedding service user and carer expertise in the social work programme. At first, some resistance was encountered within the student group at studying for one module purely from within the perspective of service users and carers. Some students, wedded to the paradigm of social work as expert, raised concerns that social work practitioners’ viewpoints were not represented within the module. They wished to hear from the social work practitioner or agency perspective alternative explanations and understandings of situations and experiences discussed by the service users and carers. This objection has surfaced less obviously, if at all, in recent years, as the expectation of service user involvement has become normalised and promoted in public policy and legislation. Learning from the experience, this aspect is explicitly addressed in introducing modules taught wholly or partly by “Creating Links” and it is asserted that, whilst these modules are solely concerned with service user and carer perspectives and

"truths", the remainder of the programmes of study do address and study professional practice in the context of policy and procedure surrounding the practice of social work in the English jurisdiction.

Secondly, the marking of their work by service users caused, at first, some students to seek to challenge their grades, questioning the credentials of service users and carers to undertake the task. Again, as acceptance of service user input to services and education has grown and its prevalence increase and normalised, these objections have dissipated and instead, students have sought out formative advice from the members of "Creating Links" as to how to set about their assignments. "Creating Links" are involved in the assignment briefings given to students in lectures and individually.

Representation across groups typically using social services has not been consistent. Individuals with experience of mental health service use have been relatively forthcoming, while parents of looked after children and looked after children themselves are less frequently involved.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the evolution of the work of "Creating Links" at the University, we can say that the model of service user and carer participation in the education of social work students has, partly through design, partly through organic development, come to be an essential component of the overall student experience. The group has to be understood as an integrated section of the academic delivery of social work education and not as an outside influence invited to join in as required. Students come to understand that the members of "Creating Links" are not "just" service users, but people from all walks of life with all sort of academic, employment, family, cultural and life experiences; people with information to share and, like the students, learning all the time. The members' individual experiences vary and "none of us fit into neat little boxes".

Without question, the impetus towards further integration of service users and carers' knowledge and understanding in service provision and professional education across disciplines is accelerating. Recent English legislation and policy guidance prescribes and affirms it and groups promoting the rights of service users demand further influence and personal control over the professional services they consume. The "Creating Links" group seek to answer these calls in such a way as to positively affect the experience of future generations of social workers and service users and to undertake their partnership with the University in such a way as to genuinely participate in co-produced and co-created education.

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The Project of Artistic Workshops with Students: Achievements and Challenges of Participatory Practice in University Curriculum

Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of participatory practice of students, presented on the basis of the project *Artistic Interventions: Self-Development Through Art*. It was conducted among students of the University of Łódź, Faculty of Educational Sciences, in the academic year 2015/2016. The assumptions and proceedings of this project were presented through the lens of participatory practice in the academic environment.

The workshops offered within the project met the repeatedly expressed self-educational artistic needs of students. The shortage of such classes was one of the main findings that emerged from research on self-education carried out by the author among students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Łódź, in 2012. The research was carried out using the dialogue method, utilising a group interview technique.

Observations made by the author during the organization of workshops, enrolment, classes and preparation for the final concert and exhibitions of *Artistic Interventions* were tested out against the remarks and experiences of the teachers conducting the workshops. Unexpectedly, offering supplemental, voluntary self-educational activities posed some problems. Although organizing free of charge artistic classes for students is not easy, even achieving this appears not to be sufficient. Creating and sustaining participatory practice among students seems to be essential. This practice would, in the long term, result in increasing their activity and responsibility for their educational process. This situation is related to the issue of staff participation that is more and more often mentioned in the context of university education in Poland.

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Introduction

The founder of Polish social pedagogy, Helena Radlińska, highlighted the significance of culture, comparing it to the soil from which social life grows (Radlińska, 1961). Lech Witkowski, who has made a contemporary interpretation of her works, underlines the fact that in the context of these views no one is a true pedagogue unless they are also social pedagogues, and no one is a true social pedagogue unless they are also culture pedagogues (Witkowski, 2014: 168). Thus, it seems justified to apply the term "participatory practice", coined within social pedagogy, to activities and initiatives where the predominant feature of which is culture.

The author of this paper analyses the project of artistic workshops for students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Łódź, claiming that such workshops can serve as examples of how to apply participatory practice in the university environment.

The term "participation" is usually used when referring to joint work with beneficiaries of social welfare services. Students, however, for reasons obviously different than those of disadvantaged groups, are also sometimes exposed to harmful processes that could be prevented through empowerment. These processes, even though the scale of the phenomenon is completely different than in the case of beneficiaries of social welfare services, can lead to the sense of lack of agency, and sometimes even apathy.

What might the lack of empowerment look like in the university environment? The very fact of being a student indicates independence and enterprise, allowing the assumption that a given person has an idea for themselves, which is being consistently implemented (selection of the programme and university), and that they are organizationally efficient (the necessity to find accommodation in a new place or to commute to the university, and to cope with financial challenges). However, studies today are, arguably, not taken as seriously as they used to be a few decades ago, and particularly pedagogy is not treated very seriously sometimes as it is a programme that can be studied in many different places both full-time and part-time, and it is easy to get admitted to it but after graduation it is difficult to find a job. For years, both pedagogy and psychology have been among the most popular programmes (Informacja o wynikach rekrutacji/Information About the Enrolment Results, 2016), however, competition between candidates for psychology is much stronger.[1] According to the report on the research project *Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego/Human Capital Balance*,

[1] The only exception is the Pre-School and Early-Learning Pedagogy (Informacja o wynikach rekrutacji/ Information About the Enrolment Results, 2016).

summarizing research from 2012, pedagogy is one of the programmes with the largest percentage of graduates who are professionally inactive (Górniak, 2013): it occupies the third position on this dishonourable list, with a score of 17.10%. Considering the decade before the research, 10.3% of pedagogy graduates are unemployed. The report does not specify whether the graduates who are employed hold positions connected with their education. However, everyday observation and conversations with students and graduates allow us to assume that many pedagogy graduates work in professions unrelated to this field of study; in many cases their jobs are temporary and occasional and taken out of necessity, and not in order to develop professionally in a given field.

In this situation, the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Łódź University needs activities that foster both the objective of giving control over the education process to students and the heightening of their subjective sense of having such control. It is necessary to facilitate their reflection on whether they really want to work in this profession, what they would like to do, and what their strengths are.

These actions lead to empowerment which is not only a value in itself but also the first and essential step to increasing participation. It is very important for students, who are in their first stage of adulthood, but in the university environment they are still treated as pupils sometimes.

Participatory involvement is increased by art activities because art and creative work stimulate independence and autonomy, and avoid simple repetition and imitating. That is why art enriches a person and helps to develop his/her self-knowledge (Wojnar, 1994). Art education cannot do without active participation of a student and his/her decisiveness, so it should aim at increasing participant's autonomy. As Janusz Plisiecki notes, nowadays art demands more than in the past, because it grows from a more complex reality. It is now not enough to be a "receiver", being a conscious participant in culture is essential. That is why art is an important and complicated educational challenge (Plisiecki, 2001). Participatory approaches are implemented successfully, among others, in museum education, where it inclines to creating one's own ideas, sharing them, discussing and building relationships.

As Anna Jarkiewicz notes (Jarkiewicz, chapter in this volume), participation in education encounters many difficulties and one of the greatest is being accustomed to established roles and certain behaviour related to them, which is visible among teachers and students, as well. Another obstacle is fixed organizational schemes, which are difficult to change. As we can see further, similar problems appear in higher education, too.

For this reason it is impossible maybe to expect participation in art education at the university in its most radical form. In this chapter participation is defined as:

taking part in work of a group or a team, contributing of an individual in affairs of a group, bigger collective or local community, cooperation with the other (formally or informally) (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2007: 66).

In a certain situation students take some decisiveness for their own affairs, and some responsibility, inextricably linked to it.

Assumptions of the project

Enhancing empowerment and participation was one of the goals of the artistic workshops *Artistic Interventions. Self-Development Through Art*. They form the subject of this discussion in the context of empowerment and participatory processes in higher education institutions. The project, the essence of which were the workshops, was conducted in the spring semester of the academic year 2015/2016 at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź. Funds for the project were provided by Santander Universidades bank as a result of a competition. The project manager was the author of this contribution.

The aims of the project were established on the basis of observations of everyday practice at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Łódź, and talking with students, as described below. These aims were the following:

- Supporting the intellectual and personal development of students, and particularly their skills in self-presentation, self-discipline, self-awareness and creativity;
- Encouraging students to be active in relation to their self-development outside the compulsory curriculum;
- Creating conditions for students independently discovering values of communing within art and artistic classes;
- Developing students' artistic skills;
- Providing students of the two programmes at the Faculty of Educational Sciences – Pedagogy and Psychology – with the conditions for cooperation and getting to know each other better;
- Preparing artistic presentations for the whole academic community of the Faculty of Educational Sciences (Sasin, 2015).

Out of the six significant aims of the project listed, only two are strictly artistic in nature. The aims went far beyond "mere" artistic development of students and enhancing their interest in art. To some extent, this results from the idea behind the project, which required "supporting personal, intellectual and professional development of students with the aim to use their new skills in social and professional life" and "promoting innovation and creativity among students and young academics" (*Konkurs na projekty/*

Competition for Projects, 2015). Regardless of the objectives formulated by the decision-makers, it should be emphasized that communing with art offers benefits going far beyond the development of purely artistic skills. The project in question allowed us to highlight non-artistic benefits of communing with art, which are so important that an implementation of an artistic project might actually meet the objectives of social work the aim of which is – pursuant to the definition provided by IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) – to support social change, "solve problems arising in interpersonal relationships, and enhance and liberate people in order to enrich their wellbeing" (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2006: 359). Particularly the last part of the definition quoted corresponds with the issue in question. This is why, it can be argued, that many social projects are based on the use of art.

Artistic Interventions consisted of three artistic workshops, each covering 37 hours of classes. These were vocal workshops *Ja i mój głos/ Me and My Voice*, artistic workshops *Nie tylko pędzlem/Not only with a Brush*, and multimedia workshops *Moje ja w sieci/Myself on the Net.* The workshops were conducted by specialists combining artistic and teaching competencies; two out of the three teachers work at the Faculty of Educational Sciences. Up to twenty-five participants could take part in each workshop. The classes were aimed at students of both the programmes of the Faculty: Pedagogy and Psychology, including all specialities, full-time and part-time. All those interested had to declare their participation in classes throughout the semester (and not only in some of them), and any possible resignation had to be submitted in writing. The participants received certificates of participation in the project, however, this did not entail the granting of any additional ECTS point. In June 2016, results of the artistic activities were presented to the community of the Faculty of Educational Sciences in the form of a short concert and two exhibitions.

Formal management/arrangements of the project required appointing a project manager as a person responsible for the whole of the enterprise, which did not exclude later decisions about giving some competencies or tasks in a certain field to the others.

Planning of the project was started as early as 2012, and the idea originated from brief research conducted in relation to a national conference *O tożsamość zawodową pedagoga sztuki/For the Professional Identity of Art Pedagogues.* The research used the dialogue method and the group interview technique with a group of 12 future teachers: students of the first year of second-cycle (MA) studies, Education Through Art speciality, at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź (Sasin, 2013). These interviews, the main topic of which was supposed to be self-education and its organization by the respondents, turned out to be a significant source of knowledge of problems and difficulties connected with this

speciality, as suggested by the students. The respondents drew attention to the necessity to meet the increasing requirements of the labour market, and they made attempts to determine to what extent pedagogical studies prepare future teachers for fulfilling their demanding role. They expressed concerns that the studies selected did not prepare them adequately for their future profession, and they confirmed the need to supplement their knowledge and skills:

> (...) if we want to be perceived well by our students and feel good in this job, we need to undergo some additional training, find some new techniques when it comes to artistic classes or some ways of sharing musical knowledge, (…) some unconventional methods;
>
> Those who continue their [MA] studies, should answer the question about whether they feel competent enough to conduct classes in any field. If I were to answer this question, I'd say no, and none of the classes offered here are able to fully prepare me for this, and this is where this need for additional training courses comes from (Sasin, 2013: 178).

The respondents noted that there were many additional courses and skills improvement training offers available, however, they could only be accessed outside the university:

> People who come here, seeing our curriculum and timetable, immediately start looking for some artistic activity elsewhere, just to get a foothold somewhere, for example, in a cultural centre (dom kultury). They spend their free time there and they don't think about starting [anything] here [at the university] (Sasin, 2013: 178).

The lack of previous artistic experience does not translate into a greater interest in such activity – just the contrary, in order for cognitive curiosity to appear, a certain level of knowledge is required, providing the awareness of one's own ignorance and creating a need to change this situation. This is highlighted by D. E. Berlyne: "Epistemic curiosity is not at its maximum with complete ignorance but increases, up to a point, with increasing knowledge" (Berlyne, 1965: 262). In order to arouse students' need to develop in this direction, they should be able to gather at least a small sample of similar experiences.

The research mentioned became one of the reasons behind the organization of the artistic workshops. However, their target group included not only students of Education Through Art but of all pedagogical specialties, and of the Faculty's second programme – Psychology. There are no elective courses in Pedagogy,[2] so it seemed particularly important to offer students some choice and a possibility of making a decision based on their own judgment.

[2] Formally, the curriculum includes elective courses, however, students must choose a specific programme if they want to acquire pedagogical qualifications needed and assumed in the educational offer. The choice is thus only apparent.

The first chance to evaluate the project was offered in June 2016, when the participants made their artistic presentations. The next step was to settle on, and report on the project. In October 2017, which was nearly one year and a half after the end of the project, interviews were conducted with all the teachers, the aim of which was to facilitate the interpretation of the workshops in the context of participatory practice in a higher education institution. Interviews with the three persons were conducted using the free-form guided interview technique (Konecki, 2017). The interviewees were described in the chapter as "Teacher 1" (*Moje ja w sieci* workshops), "Teacher 2" (*Nie tylko pędzlem* workshops) and "Teacher 3" (*Ja i mój głos* workshops).

Based on the example of the workshops in question, empowerment can be analysed from two perspectives: as empowerment of students and employees. Students were given an opportunity to select classes, develop their nterests, plan their free time, and influence the events taking place at their university. Unfortunately, because of the formal procedures, student's participation in planning workshops, their goals and programme could not be significant. This situation shows how institutional circumstances obstruct striving for participation at the university: students could not participate in making assumptions of the project, because without these assumptions the project could not materialize. Formulating a detailed plan was an essential condition of taking part in a competition for a subsidy; enrolment of the students was already the next step in the plan.

Artistic presentations at the end of the project were an infrequent example of an offer for the whole community of the Faculty, organized at least partly bottom-up by the students. Departure from the obligatory character of classes and following a fixed curriculum facilitated equal relations between teachers (myself as a formal project manager, too) and participants in classes – students. It indicates that broadening the formal frames of curriculum would be beneficial to reinforce participation at the university. On the other hand, the teachers felt empowered thanks to freedom in structuring and implementing the curriculum and the lack of any need to require certain actions from students (departure from the role of a teacher towards the role of a more experienced companion to artistic activities, a guiding spirit, and an adviser). The teachers' sense of participation was confirmed by the interviews conducted, an analysis of which is presented below based on successes and difficulties in the implementation of the project. It was impossible to conduct research among the participants of the classes eighteen months after their completion as some of the students had already left the university. At that time, however, I received much feedback proving that the initiative undertaken had been successful. Students frequently asked about similar projects in the future, declaring their readiness to take part in them, and

some of the participants maintained contact and cooperation with the teacher of the vocal classes:

> I even get messages with questions about something, they write emails to me, they find me on Facebook and write to me. (…) some of the people still wanted to take part in classes and sing in ensembles, I've invited some to my amateur choir for adults (Teacher 3).

Participation in the project – achievements and impediments

One of the most important objectives of the workshops and one of their successes, even if not achieved without problems, was the stimulation of the students' initiative, which was expressed in the very fact that they took part in the classes, which were not compulsory and for which no ECTS points were awarded. The enrolment for the workshops proved that there was a large group of students willing to take part in them, however, during the stage of organizational arrangements many of them withdrew. They were faced with the fact that participation in workshops required involvement and entailed certain inconveniences: waiting after classes, coming in the evening, devoting their free time etc. All these elements, seemingly obvious, made about a half of the enrolled students withdraw just before the beginning of the classes or after the first classes (there were some standby lists). Just before beginning of the classes there were more candidates than places: 35 persons for *Ja i mój głos* workshop (10 persons on a standby list), 27 persons for *Moje ja w sieci* (2 persons on a standby list), 48 persons for *Nie tylko pędzlem* (23 person on a standby list). However, after the project was finished there was a much smaller number of participants who achieved level of activity and attendance enough to formally certificate their participation: 14 persons at *Ja i mój głos* workshop, 10 persons at *Moje ja w sieci*, 20 persons at *Nie tylko pędzlem*. There were less persons than expected in each and every group. Some students probably enrolled "just in case", on the spur of the moment, and bore in mind that they could resign. Organisational reasons were also significant: considerable number of people resigned when terms of classes were fixed and announced. Reasons they gave were for example: "classes are late, coming back home would be complicated", "I have another class at the same time", "I want to be free at least one evening in a week". Unfortunately, if one group gathers people from different specialities and years of studies, it is completely impossible to fix a time that would be convenient for everybody – all the more as the accessibility of an appropriate classroom is essential, too. Students who gave up during the classes pointed out tiredness or disappointment at classes. It turns out that, paradoxically, that it is sometimes easier to accept inconveniences imposed by someone else,

than those which are a result of somebody's own decision. The necessity to fulfil duties imposed from the top obliges to find additional solutions and helps to mobilize hidden resources. In a voluntary situation students are more inclined toward skipping additional commitment. High frequency of such behaviour indicates that external motivation is more frequent than internal motivation among these students.

This remark encourages us to consider commitment of Pedagogy students (who were majority in the project) in educational process. For dozens of years Pedagogy is one of the most popular fields of study in Poland. It does not result from great prestige of this job, the view of high salary or broad employment possibilities. As it was mentioned above, the ease of admitting and graduating is decisive. It results in negative selection: Pedagogy is considerably often a choice of young people who have not specified interests or professional plans. They are not active at the university and do not show initiative, because extensive development is not their goal – they aim at easy transition to graduation and getting a "paper". It is extremely difficult to encourage such students to participatory action.

Interviews with the students indicate that, on the one hand, they complain about an insufficient number of artistic classes and they would like to have more such classes on the curriculum, but on the other hand, such classes should not be offered together with the present ones but instead of them. Naturally, an organizer of workshops conducted as part of a one-time project cannot reform the whole curriculum and liquidate subjects that the students consider unnecessary, which was why the interest in additional workshops was smaller than expected. What's more, this experience showed that there is lack of connection between previous, non-academic students' experiences and forming obligatory curriculum. Students' knowledge and abilities gained at the university and outside university, before studies and during them, should be perceived as a whole because they altogether constitute a person's competencies for a chosen field of activity.

Thus, it seems that it is not enough to implement external conditions for empowerment and participation. This must be accompanied by conditions that, by analogy, might be called "internal": maturity, the measure of which is the readiness to make choices and take their consequences, and readiness to take responsibility towards a group. These skills should be developed already in schoolchildren, which requires the creation of proper institutional possibilities. Students, after twelve years of school education that made them accustomed to carrying out tasks given by the teacher, will not become active and independent overnight, and they will not be able to use the extensive educational offer competently, plan their own development and career, and successfully assess sacrifices they can make for education. School, where nearly everything is supposed to be done as

instructed and even interpretation of literary masterpieces needs to follow a given key, produces young people who might be diligent and dutiful, but who lack independence and the courage necessary to explore the world in a creative way. In spite of emphasizing the importance of working in groups at school, many young people coming to university perceive their activities only in the context of their own needs and they are not willing to undertake activities for a group or a community. The reason is, that in school they are assessed individually, not as a team, and there appears more competition than cooperation between pupils. This is highlighted by remarks of all three persons conducting the workshops. "Teacher 1" said:

> Studies that were selective at the beginning and covered five years of education allowed people to get close, they knew what it was all about, and the sense of security was greater thanks to these five years. Now students have this time divided, they don't settle in this space. And there are also external conditions: they have to work, now students already think how they will earn their living after graduation. We were idealists. We went to the university to learn something, for idealistic reasons. And not for money. These are two completely different approaches.

"Teacher 2" noted that it is very difficult to empower students if work with them only starts at the university:

> These first classes that come, for them this is a continuation of high school, so there is a great distance between the teacher and the student. They approach exercises given by the teacher like pupils: do something, see whether it's enough, ok, so that's all, I can go.

As could be noticed above, lecturers sometimes do not try to understand determinants of certain students' behaviour. They criticize their passivity and lack of involvement, but do not recognize the reasons of such an attitude. Young people who start their studies usually take with them their school customs and habits. In Polish school, although the necessity of personal treating of a child and changing educational model is expressed for about twenty years, traditional model of education is still dominant. In this model a teacher takes decisions on nearly every aspect of educational process. It is in accordance with expectations of many parents, who believe that this traditional way of teaching, which they know well from their own childhood, would be beneficial for their children. School customs are taken to the university by both teachers (lecturers) and students.

Some students would like to be less controlled, but they are not ready to accept greater responsibility. However, more responsibility should go hand in hand with more personal activity, otherwise it influences educational effects negatively.

Consequences of the respondents' "high-school" approach towards studies were their expectations about the classes, which were mostly supposed to equip them with specific skills useful in their expected future or even present jobs. In this case, the observations of "Teacher 1" and

"Teacher 2" coincide. "Teacher 1", however, notes that this observation should not be extended over all programmes as it mostly concerns the ones available nearly to everyone due to very liberal enrolment requirements:

> I can see that their approach to studies is more and more high-school. This might result from the general immaturity of the young blood, from the lower elitism of students. Less selective students are also less creative, less intellectually able, and less willing to make any self-diagnosis.

This statement follows that "Teacher 3" the reasons of such a students' attitude she sees mainly in the students themselves – she is less willing to analyze institutional and systemic circumstances and is completely unwilling to analyze her own behaviour and procedures.

Other remarks of "Teacher 3" are related to the fact that she does not work with pedagogy students from the University of Łódź on a daily basis, which is why she could not refer her observations from the classes to the knowledge acquired in other situations; furthermore, she speaks both as a teacher and a student because she still studies (part-time, second major). Based on her experience, she suggests that project activities are the best for students. The programme of Pedagogy at the University of Łódź includes few such activities, and even if they are undertaken, they are initiated by one of the lecturers and limited to specific classes. "What is it that activates students the most? Project activities, telling students to carry out a project together. I myself like such actions, they involve students meeting outside classes, but let's not forget that this is also enjoyable for them."

Sometimes university teachers, especially those who at the same time work at school or have such experience, take school procedures to the university. It is easier for them to some extent, because it enables a teacher to act in well-known schemes and gives better control over the educational process, which is important especially when teachers have to fulfil learning outcomes. Change is hindered by lack of analyzing patterns and schemes in one's action. There is not enough of reflexion and it is not favoured by the educational system.

Introducing changes and establishing new patterns always require bigger amount of energy at the beginning; it might be beneficial only later. Overburdening university teachers with many bureaucratic and reporting obligations is a reason why most of them do not feel strong and willing enough to implement changes. It suggests another source of problems with participation in Polish universities: a systemic problem.

Empowerment of the teachers conducting the workshops was mostly related to freedom in planning the content of classes and the lack of limitations imposed by the curriculum, the syllabus or learning results determined top-down. Teachers' statements follows that they use this situation to recognise students' tastes and predilections and to get to know

their potential which helps to form curricula of the artistic classes in a more precise way:

> Every interactive challenge involving other people, when one can create something that will test the possibility of untypical responses, the possibility to see how a group responds to certain unconventional tasks, also verifies students' potential from the other side. The lack of obligation to stick to the content of classes in accordance with the curriculum makes it possible to go beyond a certain educational standard and to provoke. What does this give us? Definitely, greater general knowledge of students, of the way people think in general; these are more social aspects, when they do something, going more towards full individualism, self-presentation, self-creation, meaning to see how much people in general would like to expose themselves and whether they know how to do it using visual arts.

"Teacher 2" emphasizes greater possibilities of creation on the part of the teacher, and the possibility of implementing ideas that otherwise would be impossible to put into effect:

> I could do some things I have not enough time for during, for example, classes in methodology [art teaching] or artistic forms and techniques because… In this case, it was also an experiment for me, I could see what sells, which classes are most enjoyable for students, or which are simply most fun. I could try out ideas I had been mulling over but had never had time for. I could come up with new things.

What mattered the most to "Teacher 3" was the opportunity to work with a different age group than usual. It indicates openness to new experience and aspiration to develop of this person:

> These classes really offered me a lot, most of all this was another choir experience for me, meaning another contact. I conduct amateur choirs where people come voluntarily, they are mostly elderly people, and here we were nearly at the same age and I really liked working with them. I had some fears about how they would treat me, but now we keep in touch.

In all workshop groups, the lack of the necessity to pursue objectives formulated in advance resulted in the co-creation of the syllabus together with the students. Teachers used this opportunity to varying extents. "Teacher 1" developed general assumptions of exercises, and left the decision about the details to the participants: "The assumptions [of the exercises were] my own, general provocation, and they directed me towards the context of the task. They had no complete freedom, unless as part of the task implementation." "Teacher 2" conducted a survey during the first meeting in order to get to know the expectations of the participants and to be able to come up to them:

> In fact, I tried to create a diverse syllabus, so that everyone could find something for themselves, depending on their programme, but I also developed the syllabus adapting it to the expectations of students. During the first class I asked them about their expectations. As most participants were girls from the Department of Pre-School and Early-Learning Pedagogy, they wanted something they would be able to use in their work with children. But I didn't want to provide them with any final solutions because you can find many of them on the Internet, there are all sorts of scenarios there. I wanted these

> classes to be oriented towards thinking, so that they would later think how to adjust it to the age of a specific child. And I wanted these classes to be developing and nice.

"Teacher 2" used more free classes to develop students' initiative, independence and creativity.

During the first class, "Teacher 3" presented the participants fragments of music in different styles in order to stimulate their imagination and to learn their interests:

> At first, there was a meeting, so that I knew what the final group would be and whether I would be able to find the right repertoire. Then I asked them in what direction they would like to go: something lighter or strictly sacral, classical or folk. They said that either something light or folk.

During the interview, the respondent emphasized that selecting the repertoire together with the choir is a prerequisite for their involvement:

> The conductor cannot choose the repertoire without any consultation with the choir because when I make a decision myself and show them "who's boss", there's no way the singers will come for more than a month or two, because they won't enjoy it. It's obvious you have to give them an opportunity to decide.

An unquestionable benefit of the project was the consolidation of the relationship between culture, artistic classes and professional competencies of a pedagogue in the university environment. In order to explain the significance of such an activity, one should refer to the history of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź. There used to be a programme called Music Education, which included many individual artistic classes in playing different instruments, with musicians from the Academy of Music in Łódź. Many candidates wanted to study here because of such classes. The Music Education programme was discontinued more than ten years ago and the curriculum has changed drastically. However, many lecturers including the Faculty's decision-makers are still afraid that artistic classes would be considered more attractive, more significant and more valuable than the pedagogical classes, which might weaken the pedagogical ethos shaped in this environment. Implementation of a project treating art as a method for enhancing extra-artistic competencies of future pedagogues – education through art and not only education for art (Read, 1976) – should be thus treated as particularly valuable. It allows enhancement of the empowerment of students through deactivation of the unwritten aversion to art present at the Faculty, which might be regarded as an element of a hidden curriculum (Kwieciński, 2004). It also has to be noted that the existence of a strong, extensive hidden curriculum, which is defined as "all effects of school education, produced without and beyond the intentional activity of teachers (and school as such), which are not openly ascribed to and realized by students" (Kwieciński, 2004: 83), weakens the sense of empowerment of both teachers (pedagogues, lecturers) and pupils (students).

The interviews confirm that participation depends not only on external conditions. It is fostered by greater self-awareness, with individuals who are more self-confident and make better choices and judgments. The need for such insight and reflection is a natural human need:

> The conclusion is that people generally use self-expression as long as it isn't direct and doesn't expose too much, but resorts to symbols and metaphors; then they are willing to do it, because generally they want to talk about themselves in some way, but not directly. They also expect confrontation in certain matters. They also want to talk about difficult issues as long as this does not require them to provide any scientific explanation or something deeply professional because they would not be able to do it and they don't feel comfortable with it. But people definitely have the need to express opinions and to talk about themselves ("Teacher 1").

Self-insight, however, requires certain training as it not easy and might trigger defence mechanisms. For many students, self-insight through art is a novelty, which is proven by their difficulties with expressing themselves and with intellectual and emotional exploration:

> The tasks that required group work were carried out in groups, but nothing more. I expected more discussions, greater dynamics, more innovative ideas, even though on the visual level these ideas were better than when it came to the actual activity. Their work was rather boring in process terms, they were focused on their work, of course when you provoked it, because when they had a group task they stopped their individual work but they would be obviously glad to retreat to their own space. (…) The aim of the tasks was more to provoke them to think and go one step further than what the world offers, who I am in the face of the world, meaning that these were provocative tasks, but I missed this provocation ("Teacher 1").

Group art classes, such as vocal ensemble, foster the sense of responsibility which is crucial for participation. Participants of such classes personally experience responsibility for collaborative work:

> I really liked working with the group. It was better when there were more people, when the attendance was larger. Sometimes the participants said that they had something important at the university, a test or something, and that they would not come. Those choir singers who were nearly always present also noted the difference when someone was missing. (…) I think that [what matters is] contact with other people because a vocal ensemble, or in fact any team is mostly based on cooperation with others. If someone skipped class, then someone else had to show them something, give some advice ("Teacher 3").

Sense of responsibility towards the others is enhanced by mutual understanding and this is fostered by opening up towards the other people. This was experienced by artistic workshop's participants:

> One of my aims was to open their eyes a bit, so that they started to observe what was going on and didn't focus in their work on what they were supposed to achieve, the final product, crudely speaking, but appreciated the effort put in it, with the work becoming pleasure for them. To some extent, this is also connected with artistic goals. So that the group integrated a bit, so that they observed, compared their works, and were able to get inspired by others. I encouraged the students to compare their own works, asking: In your opinion, which of your works is the best? This colour or that colour? Preparing

> them for self-assessment, self-development (…) I think I managed a bit [to integrate the group], even though you could tell that the students who had enrolled in groups, stayed in those groups, but I can't say that they kept only to themselves. There was one girl studying psychology. I didn't get the impression she was a loner. This resulted from the fact that sometimes you had to pass something, exchange things, glue, scissors etc., some mundane things, but this also contributed to some contact ("Teacher 2").

The greatest problems with the implementation of the project were related to external barriers that were beyond the organizer's control: long waiting time for the results of the competition for funds, then the necessity to reformulate and limit the project's objectives as a consequence of a lower amount of money provided by the sponsor (which was not connected with the project evaluation), and then the necessity to shorten the project to one semester even though two semesters had been planned. All these factors, intensifying the organizer's sense of lack of influence on the whole activity, demotivated the organizer and made it impossible to carry out an intensive promotional campaign. On account of the fact that the project received much lower funds, it was impossible to purchase aids for multimedia classes, which – according to the teachers – was the reason behind the resignation of some of the students:

> Regardless of my ingenuity, students who came attracted by the term "multimedia" but received some free software were dissatisfied. Because they don't really respect what I can tell them about the construct, the form, or the analogy with personality; they probably expected some professional specifics: I'll learn some graphic software, something specific, I'll learn Photoshop, I'll learn something else, which will be useful in my job. (…) The fact that the programmes were freeware was disadvantageous. Because what is free is useless. It's primitive. It doesn't offer the effect that could be achieved. So some shortcuts are taken. Even if people have a vision, they're not able to fully develop it with such programmes. And this is frustrating. This brings us to the amateurish level. When you offer classes in a given area, they should be at least on a university level, conducted in a very reliable and professional manner ("Teacher 1").

Comparable remarks were made by the teacher who conducted art classes. She received additional materials and noted that the participants' involvement increased after that:

> What also mattered was that they had professional materials, I think this was printing ink and not tempera usually used as a substitute in the case of such activities when working with children, because you know, we can't poison children with such ink. I bought rollers for this purpose, rubber ones. The comfort of work using such materials was different, you know, funds for work with children are always insufficient and you always have to come up with something, to cut costs ("Teacher 2").

Student's disappointment over modest equipment could be probably reduced, if the programme of multimedia workshop would have been developed with them (element of participatory approach). It could have contributed to lower the number of student's resignations.

It was noted that the interest in the classes was limited among psychology students, which indicates that students of this programme of

the Faculty of Educational Sciences have a high sense of identity. This is connected with the fact that these are long-cycle, five-year studies (as required by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education), in the course of which students are offered the possibility to choose from many subjects; also a different campus location was highlighted. The attempt to integrate students of both programmes as part of artistic workshops was not fully successful as the future psychologists' interest in them (despite proper information and advertising) was small. This might have resulted from the belief that classes organized by an employee of the Pedagogy programme and conducted by two lecturers from this programme would be mostly of interest to pedagogy students.

From the point of view of the organizer, the greatest weakness of the project was the lack of any possibility of its continuation. No new edition of the competition for an educational project among students was organized, and there have been no similar initiatives that would allow to apply for funds and thus to repeat the cycle of classes. This would be in every respect desirable as not only would it allow another group of students to take part in the classes, but it would also consolidate the project's environmental effects, such as encouraging students' self-development (which does not only concern the participants of the classes but also other people connected with the Faculty), getting familiar with the value of communing with art and general benefits of artistic classes, and stimulating cooperation and contacts between representatives of the two programmes of the Faculty of Educational Sciences. Comprehensively understood practice of empowerment involves a change on both individual and structural levels. The project described mostly allowed the implementation of empowerment within the individual dimension, whereas its cyclical character could initiate a structural change. To talk about a participatory approach in a certain environment, in this case in a university, it must be implemented consistently and become a *modus operandi*, not only an incidental offer.

Projects similar to the one described above encourage us to wonder to what extent one should put students under pressure with regard to self-development. Some institutional incentives are definitely possible, e.g. in the form of elective artistic classes. This would offer them a possibility to decide, at the same time allowing the university to control their activity level. Teacher 2 draws attention to the fact that awarding students' additional activity in a formal way might sometimes have the opposite effect from what was intended:

> This is a difficult question because for one person something additional will be something this person waits for and goes to every week, and really wants to do it. But when this involves getting some points, it may happen that they will start treating it as another thing they just have to get credit for.

Participatory practices in university environment – concluding remarks

Experience gained during planning, implementing and evaluation of a project *Artistic Interventions* proved that the participatory approach in higher education has its own specificity. Despite appearances, this field is rather conservative and not favourable for innovations. Institutional solutions, such as a competition for a project, which was used in this case, do not foster a participatory approach. Taking part in this competition required a detailed agenda which excluded working it out together with its participants.

Participatory approaches require some competences which, in the present situation, cannot be expected from all students. Offering the possibility of participation if participants do not have certain competences is not enough and usually does not produce the desired results. To make participation exist it is necessary to grade difficulties and help participants to fulfil the potential of the situation (which is true for both students and teachers). In an ideal situation, students would be familiar with the participatory approach from previous educational stages. In the project in question, expectations about participatory approach, for students and for teachers, could have been expressed more explicitly.

There is another significant question, namely, whether striving for the greatest possible participation in a university environment should be the aim. The specificity of education makes the relations between students and teachers not completely equal, since taking decision is always connected with taking more responsibility. The person whose knowledge is greater and more comprehensive (not only strictly academic knowledge considered) should be more responsible. Defining the desirable scope of participation would be easier if more projects with participatory approaches were to be launched, evaluated and reflected upon.

Social pedagogy and culture pedagogy are not opposing fields, they are complementary. Their objectives complement one another, so they can be implemented within one activity. As L. Witkowski emphasizes, “from the very beginning, social pedagogy was founded on the understanding of the significance of references to symbolic culture as the heritage, treasury and source triggering spirituality” (Witkowski, 2014: 395). This is confirmed by many artistic projects with objectives falling within social pedagogy. One of them is a project of work with the youth from disadvantaged districts of East Berlin, the effect of which was dance choreography to *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky. The project, conducted as part of the Education Programme of the Berliner Philharmoniker, involved eminent artists including Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra players and Sir Simon Rattle

(Berliner Philharmoniker, 2017), and its results were popularized thanks to the documentary *Rhythm is it!* (2004). A different example of a social project using music is *El Sistema* in Venezuela, a mass music education system operating since 1975 (El Sistema, 2017). In the field of visual arts, one can mention an international project for children and youth "Kids' Guernica", inspired by the famous painting *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso, the aim of which is to protest against the war and to promote peace through art and play (website of Kids' Guernica), and a Polish-Norwegian project *Peacepainting*, as part of which pupils from both countries get to know their cultures and traditions (official website of Zofia Solarzowa District Public Library in Biały Dunajec). The above examples, selected out of many others, prove that art has the power to cross barriers, to stimulate development, and to free artistic forces. In every case mentioned above participants could experience a sense of power, enhance self-knowledge and reflectiveness.

Helena Radlińska used the term "invisible environment", which covered, simply speaking, values, ideas, and any heritage of symbolic culture necessary for individuals to make conscious choices concerning their life and world. What is of particular significance in this "invisible environment" is the cultural content; if it is unavailable, it gets wasted "in local social entanglements" (Witkowski, 2014: 45). Thus, the cultural significance of social work consists in showing this "unusual background of immortality" (Witkowski, 2014: 46) and making it possible to use culture understood as a spur to development. The necessary care for the individual's cultural potential is expressed in, among other things, efforts to develop the cultural potential of their living environment. According to Polish psychologist Stefan Szuman (Szuman, 1959), the care of the access to the cultural content should lie not only in enabling contact with the work of art – which he called "availability", but also in helping to understand it and see its value – which he called "accessibility". Better access to the symbolic content was described by Radlińska as "irrigation". Culture is the soil on which the spiritual fruit of efforts put into individual development can grow. Considering so many common features, Małgorzata Kaliszewska even wonders whether there is any point in establishing boundaries between social pedagogy and culture pedagogy (Kaliszewska, 2015: 62). The above deliberations indicate that such doubts are justified.

The analysis presented above shows how many circumstances underlie participation or its lack at the university. One decisive factor cannot be indicated as crucial because what matters the most is a juncture of various conditions.

However, historical background cannot be ignored: in communistic times in Poland there did not exist favourable conditions to develop citizens' independence, initiative and decisiveness – on the contrary, submission and discipline were promoted. Distrust in principals (also teachers and lecturers) and reluctance towards cooperation were common. Many present

teachers are graduates of the communistic school. Not everybody managed to change his/her attitude towards students' activity and there are still many people who think – sometimes not quite consciously – that obedience is one of the most important and most desirable features of a student.

After regaining sovereignty in Poland in 1989 the situation in many environments changed for better. However, in education new difficult factors appeared. High unemployment in the 90s, caused by rapid economic transformation, activated the fact that, due to the lack of other constructive ideas, fast growth in the number of students was perceived as a remedy for this problem. High-school leavers *en masse* went to the university which postponed the moment of their entry to the labour market. Such rapid growth of enrolment rate would not be possible without relaxing university entrance requirements. Entrance examinations for some fields were cancelled. Simultaneously, young people's hopes for job success were aroused: politicians claimed that the lack of an appropriate education is the main reason of unemployment, which in the situation of that time was not very true. Pedagogy was – and is still, to some extent – one of fields of study that were particularly often used as an escape from unemployment.

Participatory practice in universities is also hindered by the educational system itself. Teachers have to plan their work in order to gain strictly defined learning outcomes. It requires detailed planning of the educational process in advance which excludes considerable student participation.

Participation might be of individual as well as of social dimension (Gulczyńska, Granosik 2014: 16–18). Both these ranges interpenetrate and, as can be seen in the above example, striving for participation in its individual scope can stimulate action aiming at social participation. Participation in its individual scope at one point encounters difficulties and barriers that can be removed only by changing some structural patterns. One faces the decision: whether to accept the present state of affairs or to strive for more, but it requires initiating cooperation towards systemic change.

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Part V

Participatory Social Work – Current Debates

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Radicalising Social Work: Involving Everyone; Including All Our Knowledges

Abstract

This discussion focuses on participation as an approach to radicalising social work, drawing on the experience of the author and many others in the UK and beyond. It explores the modern history of participation in policy and ideology, highlighting the empirical evidence that many people seem to feel they have little say over their lives and institutions affecting them and regard this as problematic. It highlights inequalities in participation and explores different ideological approaches to participation; their strengths and weaknesses, the emergence of service user movements; the gains from involving service users in research and the methodological and practical issues of excluding and including people's "experiential" or first hand knowledge as both practitioners and service users, the overlaps between the two groups, the importance of involving practitioners too and key issues emerging for participation.

Introduction

The particular focus of my work and life over a long period has been participation. One of the particular fields in which I have developed this interest has been social work. In this chapter I want to explore some of the key issues that have emerged for me in relation to participatory social work from these longstanding concerns. In this way I hope to make explicit both the empirical basis of my conclusions and how they connect with and are rooted in collective action and my own personal development. I should also make clear that for me this work has never been an isolated academic

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or professional activity. It has always, in a range of different ways, been inseparable from my personal life, both influenced by and affecting my own values and ideas. It has impacted on how I live as well as being shaped by my own identity and understanding (Beresford, 2016).

I have undertaken this work on participation in a number of different personal partnerships. The most longstanding of these has been with Suzy Croft, a long term social work practitioner, but they have also included numerous other collaborations with service users, practitioners, policymakers, educators and researchers. They have included collaborations with professional, management, regulatory and research organisations. They have included local, national and international projects, supported by both government and independent/charitable funders. As well as social work, I have undertaken work on participation in the context of other professions and areas of policy. The latter has ranged from land-use planning and youth services, through to community development, health and end of life care. This has led me to a concern with participation in politics, policymaking, ideology, occupational practice, management and governance, learning, research and knowledge formation. I have undertaken numerous research and development projects on participation including traditional, collaborative and user-controlled projects. These have highlighted issues of theory, ethics, philosophy, methods and methodology. The work has also focused on and involved a wide range of (overlapping) groups of people, including looked after children and young people, people facing bereavement, disabled and older people, mental health service users, poor people and people living on welfare benefits and so on. It has also sought to take account of diversity and different communities and to treat their involvement with equality

First issues to emerge for participation

Drawing on this experience, I now want to start exploring key current issues for participatory social work. Some of these have been highlighted over a long period – even if not necessarily addressed – and others have emerged more recently. The first major work we undertook on participation was *A Say In The Future* (Beresford, Croft, 1978). This was a study of public participation in land-use planning in North Battersea, then a very disadvantaged inner city area in England, going through a process of gentrification. We wanted to find out how much say local people felt they had in local decision-making and to get their views about what was needed locally. The study included a survey of a representative sample of 580 local households, including interviews with 637 people. Their comments were recorded in full, making it possible to piece together a more detailed and

subtle picture of their points of view than quantitative data alone would allow.

For me, three major issues emerge from that study undertaken 40 years ago which still seem to resonate and hold strongly today. These are:

- Agencies, authorities and organisations might think that they are involving people but often most people do not feel they participate or have any meaningful involvement;
- While people may not have a sense of being asked what they would like to see, most would like to be involved and have suggestions to make when given an opportunity;
- Different groups of people feel more or less involved and excluded, reflecting wider barriers and discriminations.

The sense of non-participation

The planning consultation that we focused on in this early study was a formal statutory scheme required by national law and central government to decide on the future planning of the area. Land-use planning was where the first legal requirements for involvement were introduced in the UK, in the late 1960s. This participation exercise was heavily advertised and involved numerous meetings and activities. Yet most people were unaware of it (61%); only about 1% took part in any way. 57% of those surveyed thought the local authority planning department knew little or nothing of what they wanted; only 1% thought it was well informed; 62% thought that the local authority took little or no notice of their needs and wishes

Most people wanting to be involved and having ideas to offer

94% of people we interviewed thought that the local authority did not ask them what they wanted. They revealed an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and offered a clear measure of their estrangement from local government – “we have no say, they just carry on…whatever you say it makes no difference…They seem to ignore you”. Yet two thirds of people said that they wanted more say. They were able to identify a wide range of issues where they wanted to see change and improvement and these did not necessarily reflect dominant policy agendas.

Inequalities in participation

The people who did get involved in this participation exercise bore little relation to the overall local population. There was a predominance of white middle class participants. Groups with the greatest social need

were least likely to be represented. There were only a handful of black and minority ethnic people and no local young people, for example, present at the public meetings that were a key element used in the consultation. Older and middle aged people seemed to be the least demanding of more say, in some cases it appeared worn down by their lack of say in the past. Younger families with children, particularly small children and local people from black and minority ethnic communities were the most assertive, reflecting perhaps the particular needs and difficulties they faced in the area. Because of young people's particular lack of say, for example, in our main survey they often assumed it was their parents we wanted to speak to, we undertook an additional survey of young people. They were well informed and painted the same picture of the area's needs and problems as their elders. Most disturbing was their strong sense that the powers that be neither understood nor were interested in their problems or would take any notice of what they had to say.

I have set out data from this study in detail, even though it was not focused specifically on social work, because there have been very few such comprehensive large scale studies of public participation and yet these findings generally seem to reflect subsequent evidence and experience more broadly. They also offer significant insights for social work. Subsequent evidence suggests that all these issues continue to hold true and be central for our understanding of participation. There are serious inequalities in who gets involved; participatory initiatives organized by government, policymakers and service providers are often seen as tokenistic by service users. Yet despite this most people want to get involved - if they have a sense that such involvement can lead to change – however modest. People generally are very realistic about what can be achieved, recognizing there are numerous interests to be negotiated, change takes time and so on.

It should also be noted that at the time of the study a left-of-centre Labour council was in power in the area, with a commitment to social justice and a concern for local people in need. However, their public participation exercise seemed to be undermined from the start by many local people's distrust of and disaffiliation from the local authority. The methods used to involve people were inherently discriminatory, advantaging those with conventional verbal and written skills. Methods like public meetings and writing in with comments were unpopular and impractical.

It is sometimes argued that people don't necessarily want to be involved in policies and services. For example, why would anyone want to be involved in rubbish collection or sewage, so long as these are properly carried out. The problem is that without such involvement, they may *not* be. Also as a rule the more closely services impact on people's lives the more they want to be involved. And of course social work and social services

can impact very directly and intimately on people's lives. There is also a tendency to confuse people's non-involvement with apathy, rather than the sense of powerlessness that is more often communicated when they are actually asked.

From participation to consumerism

A Say In The Future focused on one inner city area, but was concerned with the participation and views of "everyone" in that area. One of the earliest discussions of social work and social services that I was involved in – Community Control Of Social Services Departments was similarly concerned with the involvement of "all" stakeholders – service users, workers and other local people, even though we were particularly concerned with the "control their users have over them" (Beresford, Croft, 1980). As we said at the time,

> [Service] users however are only one of the interest groups involved. There is also the community more generally and the fieldworkers who actually provide the services. All seem to have little control of social services and their exclusion seems like different facets of the same problem; of the way social services are structured and organized and the way political control operates over them (*op. cit.*: 4).

While the *Seebohm Report* which established social services departments in the UK called for the maximum involvement of "individuals and groups in the planning, organization and provision of social services" little such involvement of service users or other local people seemed to be identified subsequently (*Seebohm Report*, 1968; Deakin, Wilmott, 1979). Rose Deakin and Phyllis Deakin found little involvement of service users and other local people in one of the two boroughs they studied. There were in addition major problems in the other. Participation in both boroughs seemed to be mainly a matter of using volunteers in service delivery.

The shift in UK national politics to the New Right from the late 1970s, which coincided with rising interest in participation, meant that there was a growing emphasis on cutting public spending and services and an increasing interest in people "looking after themselves". Thus one emerging meaning of participation has primarily related to redistributing "responsibility", rather than power or control. Another overlapping meaning, also emerged about the same time, underpinned by the same right wing ideology. This has framed participation in "consumerist" terms. It has tended to focus attention narrowly on the user or customer/consumer of services like social work, rather than addressing all interests and perspectives, as for example, we sought to in *Community Control of Social Services Departments*. It has also become the dominant discourse in what has come to be known as "user involvement".

This interest in involvement/participation across policies and services has thus tended to be tied to reactionary pressures which have sought to weaken and reduce public services and state spending, prioritized the market instead and been based on increasingly expecting people to pay for services and support. It has also been associated with the philosophy of 'new public management', based on business management models from the private sector (NPM) (Simmons et al., 2009) which has similarly been linked with neo-liberal ideology.

If the earlier interest which I identified in participation highlighted the importance of involving service users, workers and other local people, and their shared interests and concerns, this consumerist/managerialist approach has created pressures in a different direction. Thus calls to listen to consumers have often been polarized against the rights and say of workers, as if the latter inhibited or opposed service users' say. In the UK consumerist rhetoric has been associated with increasing restrictions on the employment rights and conditions of workers and political attacks on the legitimacy and expertise of professionals. We have seen the increasing devaluing of professions like teachers, nurses and indeed social workers. Service users have also been set against other local people, by being presented as a cost on public expenditure or a threat to social cohesion – which the latter have to bear. We have thus seen right-wing pressures for participation used to serve *divisive* rather than unifying purposes in modern politics and policymaking.

Participation and conflicting ideologies

It is important to be aware of this regressive development in taking forward participatory approaches to social work. This leads us to another theme that has shaped the development of participation in social work as well as more generally – the role of ideology in its development. While as I have indicated consumerist approaches to user involvement and participation have tended to predominate internationally, this has only been one of two key ideological forces which have underpinned pressure for participation. The other has been one inspired by commitments to the democratization of policy and services; social justice and more say for service users and workers. These two ideologies reflect the rival political forces emerging from the last quarter of the twentieth century; neoliberalism and new social movements. They also have different origins. While the pressure for democratization of policy and provision came from service users and their allies, that for market driven consumerist approaches had its origins in state and service system (Jordan, Lent, 1999; Todd, Taylor, 2004).

The increasing recognition of overlaps

If consumerism tends to divide us on the basis of exchange relationships, then democratizing and empowering approaches to participation encourage solidarity and mutual understanding. This has been reflected in the increasing recognition in recent years of overlaps rather than divisions between us as service users, carers, practitioners and people more generally. The truth is none of us can assume we are silos separate from others and that situations can't change. While historically the roles of social worker and "client" or service user, were often heavily boundaried and restricted, so that the sort of person who would be seen as suitable to be a professional practitioner, or likely to need help on the received end of services, would be strongly demarcated by issues of class, education, background and income, this has significantly changed. Not only have potential barriers become more permeable, but attitudes and opportunities have also changed. Thus, for example, if social workers in Victorian and Edwardian Britain were recruited from a narrow group of white upper and upper middle class men and women, like Octavia Hill or Clement Attlee, that has long since changed internationally.

Perhaps even more significantly attitudes and understandings about who and what may make for a good social worker have also changed. This became particularly evident with the emergence of "radical social work" in the 1970s (Bailey, Brake, 1975), but it has also been especially influenced by the emergence of new social movements of welfare service users beginning about the same time, including the disabled people's, psychiatric system survivors' and looked after children and young people's movements (Beresford, 1999). They began to highlight the kind of social work that they felt would be helpful from their experience. As service users and their organisations and movements became more visible, particularly from the 1980s, new alliances began to emerge between professional organisations, trades unions and service user groups and organisations. They highlighted their common concerns and shared goals.

Social work has been the site of some of the biggest innovations in this area and within that professional education has emerged as a particularly significant site and opportunity for change. Service users have seen it as having the potential to "change the culture" of practice by changing the socialization of new practitioners. Service users have emphasized the importance of educators and trainers listening to them and building on what they find helpful. Some pioneering service users became "user trainers" and "user educators", influencing the content and process of professional social work education (Beresford, 1994). By 2003, such user and carer involvement was a requirement in all aspects and stages of UK

social work professional education and was supported by funding from central government.

Practitioners in health and social care, in turn, also began to feel confident enough to come out about their own experiences of disability and distress and to argue that these could represent strengths rather than weaknesses for practice, increasing empathy and understanding with service users, building trust and encouraging openness between them. At one point, in 2007, the then UK regulator, the General Social Care Council was officially investigated and found to be discriminating against practitioners with experience of mental health problems, where these were not adversely affecting their "fitness to practice" (Boxall, Beresford, 2016).

Increasingly in the UK and elsewhere, people are being recruited to be social workers who have experience as service users, where they are able to demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and qualities to become good practitioners. They are not just being confined the kind of "peer worker" roles which have developed in related professions and areas of provision, which can be restricted to ancillary jobs and associated with glass ceilings (Voronka, 2017).

Social work academics are increasingly to be found in British universities who are "out" about their service user experience and see it as a valuable resource to draw upon in both their teaching and their role as tutors with students. New initiatives like the international network PowerUs are also highlighting new ways of building on the common cause of social workers and service users. The PowerUs network, for example has developed the philosophy of "gap-mending", first in Europe and now beyond, emphasising the importance of service users and professional students working and learning together, valuing their different perspectives and experience and building trust and understanding (Askheim et al., 2017). Shaping Our Lives, the UK service users' organisation and network recently explored the challenges faced by service users in negotiating their dual role of both being a service user representative and recipients of services. This offers a valuable aid both to disabled people who are thinking about taking part in involvement activities and for service providers who want to create services that meet the needs of people who use them (Meakin et al., 2017).

User involvement in research

However, occupational and professional training has only been one of two key sites for the user involvement advanced by service user organisations and movements internationally. The other, no less important, has been research and knowledge development.

Organised service user interest in research first emerged from the disabled people's movement although it has subsequently gained much wider interest across groups. Its impetus was the sense disabled people felt of being victimised by conventional research. They saw it as biased and over-medicalised and as a result, they wanted to develop a different kind of research – one which they saw as relevant, helpful and empowering (Barnes and Mercer, 1997; Barnes et al., 2002). The emancipatory disability research which they developed – and other expressions of user controlled research which followed it, like mental health service user/ survivor research, place an emphasis on research which:

- Equalises research relationships between researchers and researched;
- Involves service users fully and equally in the research process;
- Works to support the empowerment of service users;
- Is committed to making broader social and political change (Beresford, Croft, 2012).

Research was initially a key focus of the disabled people's movement and has since been an important locus of activity among other service user movements as well. This is because of the major role that research has long played as a key source of *knowledge*. It tends to be identified as the most rigorous, reliable and systematic method of knowledge production. This leads us to the issue of the knowledge base of social work – as well as of health and welfare more generally and also ultimately to why it is so important that the perspectives of service users and indeed practitioners have tended to be neglected and devalued.

Traditional positivist research has emphasised values of neutrality, objectivity and distance. By claiming to eliminate the subjectivity of the researcher, the credibility of the research, the rigour, reliability and replicability of its findings are seen to be optimised. Service users and their organisations, however, have challenged this. They have questioned the "unbiased value-free" position, based on professional expertise of the researcher which is seen as a central tenet of such research. User involvement in research, particularly user controlled research calls this into question, with its commitment to making change, involving service users and valuing their subjective knowledge.

Moreover, while there has been widespread policy and research support for such participation, it has itself come in for significant methodological attack for breaching these principles of traditional positivist research. Central to this is its introduction of and valuing of what has come to be called *experiential knowledge*; that is to say knowledge based on people's subjective and lived experience, rather than professional training or research and experiment. Such experiential knowledge has been granted less value and credibility under the operation of traditional research values

and principles. Instead a hierarchy of knowledge has been seen to exist with that generated through research randomised trials seen as the gold standard and first hand accounts seen as having the lowest status (Glasby, Beresford, 2006). The knowledge claims of researchers without such direct experience are seen to be stronger.

The importance of experiential knowledge

However service users have turned these arguments on their head. They have argued that by devaluing experiential knowledge we lose a key knowledge source. They also highlight that this means crucially that if an individual has direct, lived experience of problems like disability or poverty, or of oppression and discrimination, of cuts and "austerity", of racism and sexism, when such traditional positivist research values are accepted, what they say – their accounts and narratives – will be seen as having less legitimacy and authority. Because people experiencing hardship will be seen as "close to the problem", they cannot claim they are "neutral", "objective" or "distant" from it. So, in addition to any discrimination and oppression they already experience, they are likely to be seen as a less reliable and a less valid source of knowledge. By this logic, if someone has experience of discrimination and oppression, they can expect routinely to face further discrimination and be further marginalised by being seen as having less credibility and being a less reliable source of knowledge.

At the same time, the devaluing of experiential knowledge is increasingly coming to be seen as problematic. This has unfortunately been a role historically played by much social research, where problems only come to be seen as "real" when they are reported by researchers and other "experts". Then it is their interpretations and versions of issues and phenomena which are accepted. This issue of marginalising the knowledge of particular vulnerable groups has begun to be talked about in terms of "epistemic violence" (Liegghio, 2013) or "epistemic injustice" (Fricker, 2010), meaning devaluing and marginalising knowledges of people who suffer abuse, discrimination and oppression. Increasing international interest in what has come to be called "public, patient involvement" in research thus raises the uncomfortable issue of including experiential knowledge centrally and on equal terms with other kinds of knowledge. At the same time it means working towards achieving epistemic justice and ensuring that everybody can contribute to creating a general knowledge base and that perspectives of entire social groups are no longer excluded from that process. We are beginning to see the real involvement of ordinary and disadvantaged people in research, for example people with learning

difficulties, who communicate differently or experience dementia (Faulkner, 2004). There is also a growing body of work and discussion about user controlled research where people who have traditionally been the objects of research are now carrying out their own research and so restoring their epistemic existence (Beresford, Croft, 2012).

The importance of *all* practitioner knowledge

However, this concern with experiential knowledge also highlights important issues about the involvement of *practitioners* in knowledge formation. It brings us back now to the issue of the frequent exclusion of current practitioners from mainstream social work discourse and the potentially negative consequences this can have. One survivor researcher has developed this discussion. She argues that it is essential for the service user to foster their *first person* perspective and sees talking in the third person as the privilege of the non-service user, non-abused or oppressed person. But Russo has also worked as a social worker and while she believes it is crucial for accounts from the first person (the service user) to be valued and prioritised, she has also introduced the *second person* into the discussion – the *you* – and for her, here the you is the social worker. If there is to be work and a meaningful, equal relationship between service user and practitioner, she suggests, the practitioner must recognise themself as the second person in the relationship; they must be aware of themselves and bring themselves to it (Russo, 1997, 1999, 2013).

Thus as a person has their unique experiential knowledge as a service user, so does the worker as a practitioner. This has also been described as "practice wisdom" – what you learn from doing the job – and it should not be substituted for user knowledge, but it is an experiential knowledge of its own – underpinning the other half of the relationship between service user and practitioner. In addition, just as service users argue that they are much more than passive recipients of care and support; they may be parents, partners, students, volunteers, community activists, workers and so on, so social workers are much more than the sum of their professional learning. We all of us have complicated and multiple identities. We only have to think of all the different roles and relationships we each may have. None of us has monolithic or uniform identities. Identities are complex, although sometimes we are made to simplify them. Thus social workers are much more than their professional socialisation and learning. They have their own subjectivity, their own experiential as well as professional knowledge.

I want to stress here the value of social workers drawing on all of themselves, not to have to deny parts of themselves in their work. Reducing

themselves to a narrow understanding of their professional role and status is only likely to increase the gap between service workers and users, risks of alienation, "othering" and inequality. As has been seen, we should remember that there isn't a specific or discrete group of "service users". While we may be in many different places and relations to it, needing help and support is something that in our increasing harsh and unequal world, can happen to anyone, including social workers. Moreover another of the valuable benefits of user involvement has been that people with lived experience of hardship, loss, abuse and using services, are now increasingly recruited to become social workers, with that experience coming to be seen as a strength, rather than a weakness.

Participation is about including all of us

There's one final point to make about participation in relation to social work. It has to be concerned with ensuring the diverse involvement of all concerned – on equal terms. Shaping Our Lives, with government support, carried out a major four years research and development project which highlighted just how many groups of service users tend to get left out of participatory initiatives. We identified five key groups of service users who are excluded on the basis of:

- Equality issues; in relation to gender, sexuality, race, class, culture, belief, age, impairment and more;
- Where people live; if they are homeless, in prison, in welfare institutions, refugees and so on;
- Communicating differently; if they do not speak the prevailing language, it is not their first language, they are Deaf and used sign language etc;
- The nature of their impairments; which are seen as too complex or severe to mean they could or would want to contribute;
- Where they are seen as unwanted voices; they do not necessarily say what authorities want to hear, are seen as a problem, disruptive etc. (Beresford, 2013).

Similarly there needs to be recognition of the diversity embodied in the social work workforce and efforts made to encourage and support it. Thus, if we are genuinely to support a shift to more participatory social work and to accept and internalise the value and legitimacy of people's lived experience and their own knowledge, then we must also both value everyone and all of who we are – and not try and isolate that of us which has traditional expertise, from that of us which connects with lived experience. Our goal must be to include all user and practitioner knowledges and all of our selves as researchers.

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The Potential and Reality for the Inclusion of Service Users in Social Work

Abstract

This chapter sets out to examine the potential and the reality for the inclusion of service users in social work services, social work education, and social work research.
It includes special reference to such work with the most vulnerable service users, for example certain people with mental health problems. The chapter will critically examine the theoretical framework, potential of, and reality for, the inclusion of service users in social work services, social work education, and social work research.
The discussion will critically analyse the rationale, challenges and opportunities of involving service users and carers in such areas using ideas around the ethics of social work as set out in the International Federation of Social Worker's (IFSW)/International Association of Schools of Social Work's (IASSW) Ethical Codes (2012) and their Definition of Social Work (2014) and further analyzed against S. Arnstein's "ladder of participation".
In examining how we can work towards the greatest level of participation in co-production, the chapter will use examples from projects carried out by the author.

Introduction

This chapter examines the potential and reality for the inclusion of service users in social work services, social work education, and social work research.

The chapter will include particular reference to work with the most vulnerable service users, for example certain people with mental health problems. It will critically examine the theoretical framework, and potential

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and reality for the inclusion of service users in social work services, social work education, and social work research.

The rationale, challenges and opportunities to involve service users and carers as full partners and co-producers in any work from its inception, based on shared decision-making and co-production from these perspectives, are critically evaluated, using ideas from the ethics of social work as set out in the International Federation of Social Worker's (IFSW) / International Association of Schools of Social Work's (IASSW) Ethical Codes (2012) and their Definition of Social Work (2014), and further analyzed against Sherry Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of participation".

Following our examination of these levels of empowerment, it will then examine how we can work towards the highest level of participation in co-production.

The chapter will use examples from projects carried out by the author:

1) the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NIHCE) Guideline *Violence and Aggression: The short-term management of violent and physically threatening behaviour in mental health, health and community settings* (re inclusion of service users in social work services) (2015);
2) a research project to develop and evaluate a programme based on the Recovery approach in mental health work, the *Whole Life* project (re social work research***)*** ; and
3) The co-production of a European online Masters in Mental Health Recovery and Social Inclusion (2018);[1] regarding social work education.

The growing recognition of co-production

There is growing international recognition that areas of professional jurisdiction should be opened up to greater public scrutiny, debate and power-sharing (Dominelli, 2016; Plotnikov, 2016).

We will start by examining overall and overarching relevant key principles from the IFSW/IASSW *Definition of Social Work* (2014), and its *Statement of Ethical Principles* (2012). *The Definition of Social Work* (2014) states that:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. It also states that…much of social work research and theory is co-constructed with service users in an interactive, dialogic process and therefore informed by specific practice environments.

[1] See Programme website: http://www.herts.ac.uk/courses/mental-health-recovery-and-social-inclusion-online2 (accessed 18.03.2018).

The Statement of Ethical Principles (2012) gives a fuller account of what this means in practice, such as:

> Respecting the right to self-determination; [...] respect(ing) and promot(ing) people's right to make their own choices and decisions; Promoting the right to participation (for) the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives; and Social workers should focus on the strengths of all individuals, groups and communities and thus promote their empowerment.

We can see from this that the issue of full involvement and participation of service users and carers is a key component of human rights-based social work practice according to this statement, within an emphasis on defending people's human rights, and respecting self-determination. Again we see the emphasis on promoting the right to participation of service users and carers. There is the duty, then, it can be argued, for social workers to move towards the highest levels of empowerment, with duties and responsibilities in relation to the creation of the context where this can happen.

This is complicated for social work by the fact that social work is unique amongst professions, in that it looks to balance the rights of different people in the situation in terms of their vulnerabilities, and whose rights may take precedence over whose others' rights – so it is not a simple matter of just ensuring that the wishes and needs of a particular service user or carer has to be pursued fully without regard to the needs of others. Within the UK situation, this is most clearly evident in relation to issues of "safeguarding", where we know that too much of an emphasis on the rights of parents has on a small number of occasions meant that the abuse of the child from the abusers has not been given the primary focus, against the needs of the parents. So, in the IFSW Definition, there is recognition of the fact that the loyalty of social workers is often in the middle of conflicting interests, and that social workers function as both helpers and controllers.

The position in the UK

In the UK, drawing on the International definition, the professional registering body for social workers and social work qualifying programmes, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), in terms of its *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England* (2017) (that registered social workers have to abide by or risk being struck off), makes clear its view that in relation to these areas by stating:

> HCPC (2017)….. understand the need to promote the best interests of service users and carers at all times – (by ensuring that social workers are)
> – able to work with others to promote social justice, equality and inclusion;
> – able to use practice to challenge and address the impact of discrimination, disadvantage and oppression;

– able to support service users' and carers' rights to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive;
– able to work in partnership with others, including service users and carers, and those working in other agencies and roles recognise the contribution that service users' and carers' own resources and strengths can bring to social work.

Therefore, a key area of concern is how we empower service users, and this should lead us to ask what are the key factors in the best possible model for co-production?

There has been a great deal of attention paid in the health and social care field in England in relation to co-production and the key place of it in terms of delivery of services in recent years. So for example, the National Health Service (NHS) England (the main government body for setting policy overall for the NHS) Mental Health Taskforce (2016) *Five year forward view for mental health*, sets out how co-production is now acknowledged as key for mental health agencies: "Services must be designed in partnership with people who have mental health problems and with carers" (National Health Service Mental Health Taskforce, 2016: 20).

Again, the English government's National Institute for Health Research (the main government body for setting research policy and providing funding for research in the NHS) (2015), states that in their view, the most successful collaborations will be those where knowledge is shared in a mutual partnership between researchers, the public and health professionals.

Despite this supportive policy context, Josephine Ocloo and Rachel Matthews (2015) argue that progress to achieve greater involvement is patchy and slow and often concentrated at the lowest levels of involvement of the S. Arnstein (1969) ladder set out below. By this they mean that consultation is more often the norm, rather than collaboration, with some health and care professionals and organisations having not embraced the idea of partnership with service users and even feeling threatened by the notion of service users' active involvement – their power, they perceive, is challenged. They discuss how engaging professionals and service users as co-production partners is difficult and time-consuming. Years after introducing the construct of shared decision making, these principles they find are rarely employed in patient/clinician encounters in the health sector. However, they also emphasise that not all patients/service users have the desire or capacity to be active participants in co-production in the services.

Co-production- some key issues for care and health

Maren Batalden et al. (2015) argue that co-production enhances the empowerment of service users in the delivery of care. They note Elke Loeffler et al's (2013) views on several motives for this movement:

– Employing the expertise of service users and their networks;
– Enabling more differentiated services and more choice for service users;
– Increasing responsiveness to dynamic user need;
– Reducing waste and cost.

They state that co-production should aim to jointly produce services, and should build on what is there already in the relationships to strengthen this in terms of innovation and improvement.

They also argue that at its core, the purpose of any involvement activity should be to improve the health and care experience of services for patients/service users, and that of their relatives and carers as well as the wider public. Research suggests that co-production supports recovery in mental health (e.g. Slay, Stephens, 2013).

Michael Clark (2015) sets out how in mental health care concepts of co-production offer deep challenges to how mental health and illness, experiences of these, and approaches to support and care are conceptualised and approached.

Michael Clark defines co-production as a concept for and a critique of services, and a guide for action, with its roots in the 1970s civil rights and social action movement in the USA (Realpe, Wallace, 2010). Mental health services were seen to be failing to clearly acknowledge service users and their experiences in the delivery of services in general, and in their own treatments. The debate moving forward from activists, some of whom were mental health service users themselves, and with local agencies and government, led to greater involvement of service users in decisions about services.

One organisation, Think Local Act Personal (2015) in the UK, has defined co-production from the perspective of people involved in the process as:

> When you as an individual are involved as an equal partner in designing the support and services you receive. Co-production recognises that people who use social care services (and their families) have knowledge and experience that can be used to help make services better, not only for themselves but for other people who need social care (Think Local Act Personal, 2015).

Co-production, then, can be seen to be concerned with:

– Processes of connecting people and communication;
– Processes that are ongoing, rather than isolated events;
– Questions about knowledge – whose knowledge and what is valued and how is it evaluated and synthesized in to co-produced plans?
– Issues of power – what is the right balance of power in the various stages of the processes of co-production, and in particular, in relation to disadvantaged and oppressed groups?

– Concern about outcomes – who defines them, who delivers them, and how is accountability for this organised, and again, in particular, in relation to disadvantaged and oppressed groups?

These points then relate to issues about to what extent service users and carers are involved in setting any new policy or service based on co-production ideals, then operationalising these, and then being involved in the evaluation and development of them. So when we are looking at these issues, we start to think about the level of empowerment and involvement as measured by S. Arnstein's ladder (1969) and the other models deriving from this.

Applying these ideas to care services, a key feature of this is confidence being developed in service users and carers in challenging the culture in agencies and professionals' own personal and professional views which enable service users and carers to move on from being passive recipients of services directed at them by professionals and organisations. This does not mean though, that service users and carers have to be responsible for the quality of these developments – Catherine Needham and Sarah Carr (2009), for example, argue that at the same time co-production is empowering professional staff in front-line services to draw on their professional expertise and make decisions with the people they support.

The idea of co-production can be seen widely across health and social care in policy and the rhetoric of "no decision about me, without me" (Department of Health, 2010, 2012). It can also be seen in the concept of "shared decision-making", an approach that has a developing evidence-base in terms of its potential impact (e.g. Durand et al., 2014). It has been asserted that co-production has an important role to play in delivering cost-effective services (Stevens, 2008). Catherine Needham and Sarah Carr (2009) sounded a note of caution that co-production would not be able to address all of the challenges in social policy, suggesting a need for very clear definitions of and evidence for its effectiveness. Yet, the scope that co-production is said as potentially applying to all areas continues to be widened, including to commissioning (e.g. Think Local Act Personal, 2015).

So, co-production is gaining ground as a key dimension of public policy reform across the globe (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011); as a response to the democratic deficit inherent in the delivery of public services (Pestoff, 2006), and as a way forward to galvanise active citizenship (Department of Health, 2010).

Slay and Stevens (2013), in a report commissioned by MIND, a UK mental health charity, for the New Economics Foundation, Co-*production in Mental Health. A Literature Review,* defined co-production as:

> A relationship where professionals and citizens share power to plan and deliver support together, recognising that both partners have vital contributions to make in order to improve quality of life for people and communities (Slay, Stevens, 2013: 3).

Principles of co-production

Slay and Stevens see six principles as the foundation stones of co-production, as follows:

- Taking an assets-based approach: transforming the perception of people, so that they are seen not as passive recipients of services and burdens on the system, but as equal partners in designing and delivering services;
- Building on people's existing capabilities: altering the delivery model of public services from a deficit approach to one that provides opportunities to recognise and grow people's capabilities and actively support them to put these to use at an individual and community level;
- Reciprocity and mutuality: offering people a range of incentives to work in reciprocal relationships with professionals and with each other, where there are mutual responsibilities and expectations;
- Peer support networks: engaging peer and personal networks alongside professionals as the best way of transferring knowledge;
- Blurring distinctions: removing the distinction between professionals and recipients, and between producers and consumers of services, by reconfiguring the way services are developed and delivered;
- Facilitating rather than delivering: enabling public service agencies to become catalysts and facilitators rather than being the main providers themselves.

Most of the strongest examples of co-production, Slay and Stevens (2013) argue, have all of these principles embedded in their day to day activities, but some principles may feature more strongly than others. Criteria to judge the level of participation might be argued to be as follows (Slay, Stevens, 2013):

Doing to

The first stages of the pathway represent traditional services at their most coercive. Here, services are not so much intended to benefit the recipients, but to educate or "cure" them so that they conform to idealised norms and standards. Recipients are not invited to participate in the design or delivery of the service; they are simply supposed to agree that it will do them good and let the service "happen to them".

Doing for

As the pathway progresses, it moves away from coercion towards shallow forms of involvement. There is greater participation, but still within parameters that are set by professionals. Here, services are often designed by professionals with good intent with the recipient's best interests in mind, but service user's involvement in the design and delivery of the services is constrained. Professionals might, for example, inform people that a change will be made to how a service is to be run, or they may even consult or engage them to see what they think about these changes. However, this is as far as it goes. People are invited to be heard, but not given power to make sure that their ideas or opinions shape decision-making.

Doing with

These most advanced stages of the pathway mark a deeper level of service user involvement that shifts power towards them, requiring a fundamental change in how service workers and professionals work with service users, recognising that positive outcomes cannot be delivered effectively to or for people, but can only truly be achieved with people, through equal and reciprocal relationships. Service users' voices must be heard, valued, debated, and then acted upon (and the results of all this fed back to the service users involved). This can take many forms, from peer support and mentoring to making decisions about how the organisation is managed/policies developed/reviewed. At this level, service users' assets and capabilities are recognised and nurtured, professionals and services users work together in equal ways, respecting and valuing each other's unique contributions.

So, in this model, understanding of co-production is informed by

– the presence of the six principles of co-production;
– how power is balanced between people getting support, and the professionals involved in co-production;
– in relation to social care it involves the insight that care services cannot be produced without input from the people who use services.

Co-production requires a culture that values service users and practitioners alike, and that this may be achieved through a broader adoption of relationship-centred approaches.

In examining how we can move towards co-production rather than just taking into account the views of service users about their services, we can make use of S. Arnstein's "ladder of participation" model (see below), which as part of its 8 rungs on the ladder goes from the bottom 2 rungs of the ladder – Manipulation and Therapy – to the 2 topmost rungs, Delegated Power and Citizen Control.

"Othering" of disadvantaged and oppressed groups

Adital Ben-Ari and Roni Strier (2010) argue that the French philosopher Emanuel Levinas' conceptualisation of the "Other" (Levinas, 1969), based upon philosophical ideas of how we can claim to know the experiences and reality of others that may further label those other cultural/ethnic groups, challenges prevalent conceptions of cultural competence and examines the relationship between cultural competence, where social workers understand and positively respond to problematic areas in cultural differences, and the "Other", especially where they are from disadvantaged and oppressed groups. Cultural competence means having the ability to appreciate the experiences of, communicate and work effectively with, people from different cultures. It can be argued that in order to work well with differences, a comprehensive understanding of the relations between "Self" and the "Other" is necessary (Ben-Ari, Strier, 2010; Park, 2005). Adital Ben-Ari and Roni Strier state that social work must recognise it needs to respond effectively to people of all different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, religions, social classes and "Other" diversity factors in a manner that recognises and values the worth of individuals, families and communities and protects and preserves their dignity (Littlechild, 2012).

One example of the issues involved in, and responses to, the identification and development of cultural understandings is that of child protection work the United Kingdom, which has a lengthy history of migration and movement of people. When families move countries they bring with them their own traditions and customs, their religious faiths and child-rearing of children. Adjusting to new traditions and child rearing "norms" creates difficulties for families and this is something social workers need to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to. For the families, however, these experiences are often tainted by discrimination in the UK, and at times open hostility, and the fact that often they do not have a readily available, or culturally acceptable, network of support to draw on, and/or they may be dislocated from community and cultural networks. Many migrants experience a sense of loss for the country they have left. There are also the effects of migration from the longer history of such movements for families, children and young people; for example for second, third generation and other previous former immigrant families, even if those families have been settled in the UK for many generations. Children who have been socialised in the United Kingdom within, for example, the school system may potentially find this causes cultural strains with family, friends and social structures (Simpson, Littlechild, 2009).

It has been argued that co-production provides a means to overcome the "othering" involved in much service delivery, allowing service users to

(re)discover a sense of agency and opportunity to act on and change their own situations within the wider world (New Economics Foundation, 2013).

The place of "agency" is key to reinstating marginalised people as citizens; Pierre Bourdieu (1984) views the most damaging forms of social suffering as those experienced by people "on the margins": those who have reduced access to empathy, respect and social recognition – this is also a theme which has been taken up in an extensive literature (see e.g. Frost, Hoggett, 2008).

Models of co-production

One of the most frequently referenced and utilised models of levels of co-production derives from work in public planning in the USA in terms of S. Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969), but also applicable to all service users.

At the highest rung on the ladder, experts by experience lead from the outset-followed by, in descending order of levels of participation:

- Equal partnerships between staff and experts by experience from the outset;
- Experts by experience included once main area of the policy practice is determined;
- Experts by experience are consulted about the main areas of work, but not included in key decision-making discussions/reviews;
- "Lip service" is given to the inclusion of experts by experience and are only informed of key decisions;
- Manipulation of experts by experience solely to give the impression that experts by experience co-production has taken place (Arnstein, 1969).

Debates continue to range across what are the most appropriate levels of involvement, the best mechanisms for achieving these and the outcomes from that involvement. The National Institute for Health Research School for Social Care Research, for example, has published a scoping paper by Beresford and Croft (2012) in which the authors argue for more user-controlled research.

Josephine Ocloo and Rachel Matthews (2015), as mentioned above, argue that at its core, the purpose of any involvement activity should be to improve the health and the experience of services for patients, their relatives, and carers. Schema 2 below provides a typical organising framework for involvement (the term engagement is used in this framework) that shows involvement can take place at multiple levels.

Schema 1. A multidimensional framework for patient and family engagement in health and healthcare

Continuum of Engagement:

Levels of engagement →	**Consultation →**	**Involvement→**	**Partnership and shared Leadership**
Direct care	Patients receive information about a diagnosis	Patients are asked about their preferences in treatment plan	Treatment decisions are made based on patients' preferences, medical evidence, and clinical judgment
Organisational design and governance	Organisation surveys patients about their care experiences	Hospital involves patients as advisers or as advisory council members	Patients co-lead hospital and quality improvement committees
Policy making	Public agency conducts focus groups with patients to ask opinions about a Health Care issue	Patients' recommendations about research priorities are used by public agencies to make funding decisions	Patients have equal representation on agency committee that makes decisions about how to allocate resources to health programmes

Factors influencing engagement:
Patients (beliefs about patient role, health literacy, education)
Organisation (policies and practice, culture)
Society (social norms, regulations, policy)

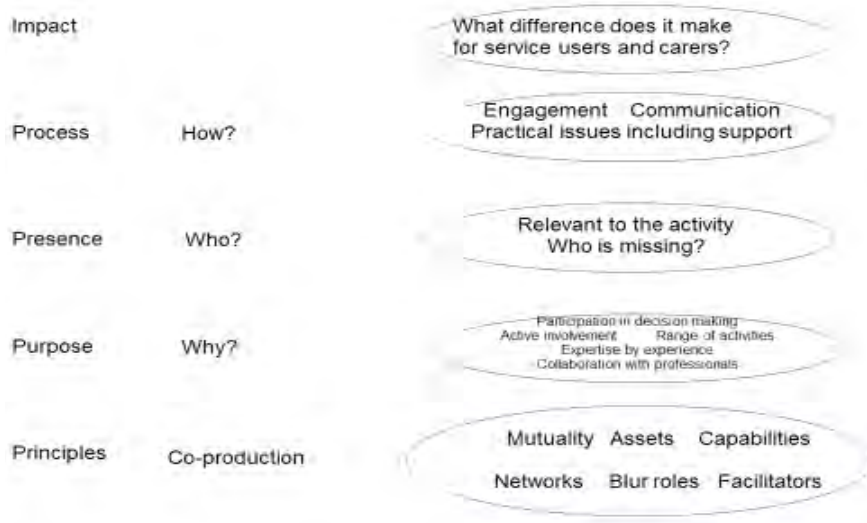
Source: Reproduced in Ocloo and Matthews (2015) with permission of Project HOPE/Health Affairs from Carman et al. (2013)

It can range along a continuum, from consultation to partnership and shared leadership. At the lower end, patients are involved but have limited power or decision-making authority. At the higher end, involvement is characterised by shared power and responsibility, with patients/service users as active partners in defining agendas and making decisions. Service user involvement can occur at the level of individual health behaviour or

direct care, or at the collective level in organisational design and governance and in policymaking. Other areas can include commissioning, monitoring, evaluation and research. Multiple factors can affect the willingness and ability of patients to engage at these different levels, including patient beliefs about their role, health and care literacy, education, organisational policies and practices and culture, society and social norms, regulation and policy. Josephine Ocloo and Rachel Matthews (2015) believe that issues to do with inequality, discrimination and social exclusion also play a strong role in preventing many individuals and groups participating in the involvement process as indicated in schema 2 below. This schema builds upon S. Arnstein's widely quoted "ladder of citizen participation" referred to above, describing "a continuum of public participation in governance ranging from limited participation, or degrees of tokenism, to a state of collaborative partnership in which citizens share leadership or control decisions".

Littlechild and Machin (2016), in a presentation entitled to the McPin Foundation's conference on 30 November 2016, *Collaborating with people with lived experience public involvement: research methods*, reflected on "going the extra mile in mental health research on co-production", and suggested that we should measure participation and co-production against the following model:

Schema 2. Model of involvement



Source: Presented in paper to conference (Littlechild, Machin, 2016)

Giving examples from the presenters' own projects and research areas within the mental health field, B. Littlechild and K. Machin set out:

- The practice-based Whole Life Project, where the research team of service user researchers, agency staff, and university-based staff co-constructed a Whole Life Programme that acted as a therapeutic instrument to be used between a coach (professional), and a participant (service user), which was then evaluated by the research team of service user researchers, agency staff, and university-based staff, leading to the co-construction of the findings in the final report and in a journal article (Littlechild et al., 2013).
- The development and outcomes of an innovative online European Union funded online Master in Mental Health Recovery and Social Inclusion, developed by both agency staff and service users, and with staff and service users as students on all its 5 cohorts to date (Erasmus+ Europe Union, 2015);
- The UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NIHCE, 2015) *Guideline on dealing with Violence in Mental Health work*, addressed one of the most challenging of areas for such co-production, of working positively and jointly with service users, staff and carers in addressing the causes, consequences and resolution of issues from when there is violence from mental health service users on staff, themselves, and others in their formal and informal networks. The Guideline covers how best to respond to staff, service users and others after such incidents, and the potential for jointly produced solutions to the issues that arise, as part of the construction of the NIHCE Guideline on *Violence and Aggression: The short-term management of violent and physically threatening behaviour in mental health, health and community settings* that took place with service users and carers. Of particular note for our current purposes is its inclusion of one key recommendation, on developing service user-led monitoring units in agencies to review and make changes to services after such incidents, a recommendation being piloted in 2017 in a project by the current author.

Examples from New Economics Foundation (2013) of co-produced services

This New Economics Foundation study of co-produced services commended one particular project in this area – the Croydon Service User Network (SUN), which has been explicitly co-designed by professionals and service users. SUN members participate in the running of the service,

feedback their opinions, represent the groups at the SUN Steering Group and work alongside staff to help in the running of the groups. This ongoing connection between service users and professionals allows for a blurring of roles, and for building greater trust and a sense of shared endeavour. All members are making a valuable contribution, either in running the network, in organising group meetings, or by providing direct support to other members. The involvement of professionals as partners in the group means an active relationship is maintained, creating opportunities to influence professional practice and draw on professional mainstream professional practice, but opportunities for collaboration and influence are considerable in comparison with other examples. One aspect of this is that professional allies are funding research and evaluation of the impact of SUN as an intervention. They are in a position to use this information to influence their own professional peers, perhaps more effectively than service users can on their own.

One other programme the report mentions takes a macro level view of co-production. It is focused on rebalancing power between statutory mental health service providers and the wider community. To achieve this it has developed new relationships between community-based organisations and statutory mental health services. It is focussed on community institutions as assets, enabling community members to access appropriate support in places that have meaning for them. Faith leaders and followers have been trained to provide mental health support in community settings. There are powerful professional allies, with positive independent academic research recently published on the approach. It remains unclear how much professional practice within the larger mental health organisations has altered as a result of this initiative but the community institutions are found to have increased their capacity and networks substantially.

Service user participation/co-production in practice: a guide to action

We will now look at what may be the barriers for co-production, and then what practical steps can be taken to facilitate its implementation in social work (based on Ocloo, Rachel, 2015).

Barriers to co-production:

– *Equality and discrimination*: barriers on the basis of gender, ethnicity, culture, belief sexuality, age, disability and class, from individuals/ agencies/policies.
– *Where people live*: Homelessness, being in residential services, or the prison and the penal system. Travellers/gypsies.

- *Communication issues*: people with hearing disabilities. Blind/ visually impaired people. People who cannot communicate verbally. People for whom English is not their first language.
- *Unwanted voices*: Some points of views/ experiences are more welcome than others (particularly those who agree or are less challenging of the system or services). People can also be excluded because they are seen as too expensive/difficult to include, such as those with dementia.
- *Devaluing people*: not valuing or listening to what people say.
- *Tokenism*: asking for involvement but not taking it seriously or enabling it to be effective.
- *Stigma*: stigmatising people for their identity or why they became involved or because they have had a poor experience of care and discouraging involvement on the basis of their identity. (*Current author: and also negative discrimination towards disadvantaged and oppressed groups, I would argue*).
- *Confidence and self-esteem*: making people feel they do not have much to contribute.
- *Inadequate information about involvement*: Lack of appropriate and accessible information about getting involved or about the involvement opportunities.
- *Gatekeepers/individuals who block the involvement process*: individuals who obstruct the involvement process by their attitudes or actions and stop people getting involved.
- *Financial barriers*: not paying participants for their involvement (which is a widely accepted principle) and speedily can deter people with limited resources or high costs because of the nature of their situation or impairment from being involved.
- *Access*: ensuring all participants have effective ways into organisations and decision-making structures to have a real say in them.
- *Support*: building confidence/skills, offering practical help/ opportunities to get together to support people's empowerment and capacity.
- *Use of advocacy*: important for people who are disempowered and/ or isolated.
- *Different forms of involvement*: using innovative approaches that go beyond traditional methods; meetings, surveys, written and verbal skills.
- *Outreach and development work*: reaching out to those traditionally identified as 'hard to reach', going to them and community leaders, building trust, asking what works.

- *Meetings where used*: making them attractive, inclusive, enjoyable, with free refreshments that are culturally appropriate, safe, supportive environment, with access to key knowledge.
- *Good practice regarding health literacy*: Improving communication with all patients can include: ascertaining what the patient knows, first to determine level of discussion. Speaking slowly, avoiding jargon, repeating points to improve comprehension, encourage and expect all patients to ask questions.
- *Communicate*: In ways other than speech/printed material, e.g., multimedia, translation services/materials.

So, from consideration of all of these areas, the overarching principles of service user participation/co-production can be seen to be:

- The service user experiences feelings of respect from the agency statements and procedures, and the staff's attitudes, methods and skills;
- The person experiences that they are listened to, and valued for themselves, not because they are participating to meet agency/ worker performance indicators;
- The physical settings, timings of meetings/consultations are appropriate for them;
- Processes feel inclusive, welcoming and valuing of them;
- The person has feedback on how participation results are used/ affects their future;
- Groups of service users have feedback on how participation results are used;
- They have access to trusted supporters, and have careful and sensitive preparation for the whole participation process;
- Staff are able to think themselves into the position of the person to appreciate their concerns/anxieties about the process and possible outcomes, and demonstrate this to them;
- Check with them what you have understood the group/person has said to you;
- If research, go back with the findings/recommendations with the person/group;
- The person has confidence in how issues of confidentiality/control of the views/information afforded will be determined/used;
- Move at the peoples' own pace;
- Ready access to knowledge about procedures, and how to get support to make use of them; This is a particular problem for service users in need because of abuse or neglect, due to their access to trusted adults outside their family network, and fear of reporting abuse.

The issues then are:

How can we align these issues/models with the IFSW Standards to gain the highest level of co-production with the most disadvantaged/unfairly discriminated against/antagonistic/least confident service users and carers?

How might models for involving people with service user lived experience in social work services evolve? Based on what models and criteria?

To what extent do we attempt to/successfully manage to engage with the disadvantaged/disengaged/antagonistic individuals and groups?

These then become key questions for social work and social workers in fulfilling social work's values of service user and carer empowerment, involvement, and social justice.

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Pitfalls of Participatory Approaches

Abstract

Over recent decades, “participation” has become one of the leading mottos of reform-oriented movements in such diverse fields as democracy, technology, finance, management, mass media, culture, social research methodology and, last but not least, social work. Before our eyes the “change of function” (in the terminology of Karl Mannheim) has taken place: what in the sixties and seventies was an incorporation of subversive and alternative tendencies, has been absorbed step by step in mainstream discourses on politics, economy, social science and the helping professions. The discursive dominance of participatory ideas can be manifested when they constitute a prominent message in recent handbooks in the fields mentioned above or provide apparently self-evident justifications in typical applied research projects. This trend needs to be reflected upon if we are not to succumb to the self-destructive potential of participatory approaches.

Introduction

In this short reflection I refer to the issue of participation not only and not primarily in the field of social work, but also in many different areas of social reality, sometimes very distant from social work. I am doing so not because the idea of participation is less evident in the field of social work than in other areas of social reality, but because one cannot understand the role and place of the idea of participation in the field of social work without taking into account the fact that the seemingly exponential increase in attention paid to the idea of participation in the field of social work is part of a much broader trend.

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More specifically, over recent decades, “participation” has become one of the leading mottos of reform-oriented movements in such diverse fields as politics (especially in context of Western democracies and international development), technology, finance, management, mass media, culture, social research methodology and, last but not least, social work. The point of this chapter is to examine how before our eyes the “change of function” as it is termed by Karl Mannheim (Mannheim, 1952: 187–190) has taken place: what in the sixties and seventies was an incorporation of subversive and alternative tendencies, has been absorbed step by step in mainstream discourses on politics, economy, social science and the helping professions; it has been transformed from a critique of asymmetrical power relations into an apology of dialogue, empowerment, creativity, responsibility and the like. In other words, a new version of the dominant discourse has already been developed which consists of corrupted and watered down concepts, once symbolizing resistance against and contestation of an oppressive institutional order, and now eagerly supporting and promoting the new formula of institutional regulation of human conduct. The discursive dominance of participatory ideas can be manifested when they constitute a recurrent message in recent handbooks in the fields mentioned above or provide apparently self-evident justifications in typical research project applications.

This trend needs to be reflected if we are to avoid becoming ensnared in the self-destructive mechanisms and troublesome paradoxes of an emancipatory agenda so lucidly described by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in the Introduction to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002/1947: XVI). While they emphasize in accordance with the Enlightenment tradition that “freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking”, they also point out that enlightenment thinking should systematically reflect on itself, on its own principles, limitations and unintended consequences. Otherwise, enlightenment thinking will neither recognize nor oppose the “regressive moment” inherent in itself. What is more, without self-reflection enlightenment thinking can turn into its opposite: unreasonability, the use of stereotypes and prejudices, or susceptibility to imposing one’s own will on others.

The significance of this issue for social work stems precisely from the fact that this problem applies not only or not primarily to social work, but it is a problem of a more general nature, relating to, firstly, broader trends of development of modern society, and secondly, insufficient critical reflection in many disciplines on these general trends.

This brief commentary consists of three steps corresponding to the changes in the idea of participation from the 1960s until today, outlining (1) the phase of enchantment with the idea of participation; (2) the bipolar phase of mainstreaming and disenchantment, and finally (3) an idea of the search for a new, possibly more positive formula, enriched, however, with the experience of the two preceding phases.

The phase of enchantment

Participation is an ambiguous concept and can refer to various spheres of life of the individual. Depending on what the individual has the right to or should be involved in, we can distinguish different ways of understanding and promoting participation. Such a broad definition of the idea of participation has a long and multifaceted history, dating back much earlier than the 1960s. Two old traditions of thinking about a just social order are here of relevance. In the liberal tradition, which began as early as the age of the Enlightenment, it was (and it still is) about the universal rights of citizens to participate in political life and in the public debate. In the tradition referred to today as the "welfare state", which began later, in the late nineteenth century, and developed first in the interwar period (in particular in Germany in the 1930s), and then after World War Two, it was about the state's commitment to provide public services to the population, and therefore also the state's commitment to supply the population with access to basic infrastructure, services and goods necessary for a meaningful and dignified life.

The 1960s and 1970s brought new, strong and influential cultural and political impulses, lending the idea of participation an attractive, even compelling meaning, and associating participation with a sense of excitement and openness. In fact, participation in the social, economic and political life was meant from that moment to refer to deep existential foundations of a fulfilled life. In the face of people's weariness of the bureaucratic institutional order (for example in offices, factories and companies, schools and universities), based on a system of asymmetric professional relations, and with the monotonous and restrictive nature of representative democracy, new participation began to be associated with ideas of subversive disagreement to the fossilized institutional, economic and political order as well as with the development and promotion of alternative styles of life, work and political activity, based on the ideas of autonomy, dialogue, creativity, freedom of thought and action, and empowerment. An important support for this atmosphere came from neo-humanist and interpretive trends in the social sciences (at that time surrounded by an aura of novelty and rightful objection), which assumed that the essentially open processes of negotiation of meaning in social relations make equality and symmetry possible.

Also relevant in this context were the somewhat later re-evaluations within the management sciences, as well as transformations within management practices themselves: from relationships based on delegating precisely defined specific tasks to large groups of subordinates (deemed too anonymous and objectifying) toward a network- and project-oriented work organization based on small teams of employees, who are expected

to show their own initiative and responsibility. This change is addressed not only by the influential concept of “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2005), but also by many other sociological analyses concerning reevaluations in the field of social management organization. For example, Nigel Thrift speaks of “soft capitalism” and its rhetoric, based on the “notion of constant adaptive movement”. New metaphors appear in the new management discourse (such as “dancing” or “surfing”). Their common feature is “concern with looser organizational forms which are more able to “go with the flow”, which are more open to a world which is now figured as complex and ambiguous, and with the production of subjects who can fit these forms” (Thrift, 2005: 32–33). Many authors draw attention to the role of rhetoric promoting empowerment and participation of employees as a factor supporting their innovation: “if we believe that people in organizations contribute to organizational goals by participating inventively in practices that can never be fully captured by institutionalized processes then we will minimize prescription, suggesting that too much of it discourages the very inventiveness that makes practices effective” (Wenger, 1999: 11).

Similar changes occurred in seemingly distant areas such as politics, civil society, cultural life and private sphere. Therefore, transformations in the field of social work are in line with the general trend, which has been, however, defined by the above-mentioned changes in the area of economy and rhetoric that concerns it. Also in the field of social work a significant re-evaluation took place: social work was to abandon the role of a passive link from State to service user, supporting the activities of administration for the redistribution of social welfare, and instead taking on a role in which social workers were supposed to establish interpersonal and possibly symmetrical contact with people in their care, cultivating egalitarian communication skills, both in themselves and within those persons.

The phase of mainstreaming and disenchantment

The 1980s and 1990s saw the beginning of a two-way process of re-evaluation, lasting until today.

On the one hand, the rhetoric of empowerment and participation was absorbed by the mainstream discourses in practically all domains of social life, including social work. Thus, regardless of the intentions, sometimes most noble, of those who advocated these ideas, the process of “change of function” occurred with respect to these very ideas as components of a new mainstream culture of public communication. As mentioned above, what in the sixties and seventies was an incorporation of subversive and alternative tendencies, later on has been transformed into a new version of the dominant discourse in politics, economy, social science, psychology

and the helping professions as well as in the mass media. This way, the emancipatory discourse of the 1960s and 1970s was taken over, "reframed", neutralized and instrumentalized by the new dominant discourse, which is a response to the reality so fluid and unclear that the previous methods of top-down regulation and external control have proven ineffective or even harmful. The contribution by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) demonstrated that the formation of a new, network- and project-oriented spirit of capitalism was based on absorption and, therefore, inclusion in the new dominant discourse precisely these ideas that had fueled the earlier criticism of syndrome of "administered world", to use Adorno's terminology (see e.g.: Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002/1947: XI, XII and 232). A similar argument could be formulated with regard to areas of social life other than economy, such as politics, civil society and the private sphere.

As regards media messages, it is worth adding that the rhetoric of participation and empowerment is not the exclusive domain of liberal-leftist discourse (for example in the form of the idea of deliberative democracy, which assumes that political decisions should be preceded by a rational, argument-based public debate with the broadest possible participation of citizens) or neo-liberal discourse (for example in the form of the idea of economic entrepreneurship), but has a vital variation also within the discourses of the conservative right (for example in the form of the idea of recovering national and popular sovereignty and making one's own country "great again").

Of course, the aforementioned absorption mechanism was immediately subject to a critical assessment, which indicated that the mainstreaming concerning the idea of empowerment and participation by no means implies any "humanization" or democratization of social relations in this or that field, but – paradoxically – in practical terms neutralizes the potential of criticism contained in these ideas, and thus, under the guise of egalitarization, asserts the essentially asymmetrical power relations. This way, almost parallel to the process of mainstreaming, the second path of re-evaluation of the idea of participation and empowerment was initiated, namely the disenchantment and critical reassessment, explicitly suggesting that participation is in fact a new form of a disguised tyranny.

It can be argued that two strands of this critical backlash are particularly important. The first one draws upon Marxist inspiration and seeks to demystify the covert economic and political interests hidden behind the promotion of the idea of empowerment and participation. An important impulse providing arguments in favour of this line of criticism includes assimilation of participatory rhetoric by such institutions – one would like to say "citadels of neo-liberalism" – as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as well as the popularity of participatory rhetoric within international development issues.

However, the meaning of neo-liberalism depends on how one interprets its central idea, namely entrepreneurship. Instructive in this respect are Michel Foucault's comments, who indicated that *homo economicus* formed on the basis of neoliberalism is to be "an entrepreneur of himself", "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault, 2008: 226). Therefore, individual care for one's own human capital, supported by one's own initiative, is to be first and foremost a guarantee of economic success. But, as evidenced by the so-called governmentality studies (e.g., Rose, 1999, Dean, 2010, Peters et al., 2009*)*, in the meantime the neo-liberal "entrepreneur of himself" has become a template that an individual is meant to follow in the broadest possible range of disciplines, from politics, civil society, science, culture, and art to family and intimate life.

The "economic" interpretation of the neo-liberal category of "entrepreneurship" is not the only option. One can understand this category more broadly, namely, rejecting the primacy of economic factors and adopting a broad interpretation of entrepreneurship as the willingness to take the initiative in all areas of life. In this perspective, the mechanism of social control is not reduced to the economization of social life, as anonymous relations of power are located on a more basic level than economic relations and follow Foucault's rule of ubiquitous "conducting the conduct" of other people (Foucault, 2008: 186). Power relations in this sense, therefore, entail neither prohibitions nor commands, but indirect guiding how people themselves guide their own conduct. It is obvious that this type of power relations, aptly described by Nikolas Rose (1999: 74, 273) as "government through freedom", requires an intensive use of the rhetoric of empowerment and participation, as well as evoking the sense of autonomy and agency. It is another question, however, whether under "government through freedom" the spectrum of freedom is actually extended and if empowerment and participation do in fact take place.

Searching for a new formula

Let us try to look at the situation today. It appears that two main approaches to the issue of participation are in a state of intellectual exhaustion.

The rhetoric of empowerment and participation, supported by accents of honest enchantment, is still very much present in various fields of social life, despite the widespread and powerful wave of criticism. Persistent adherence to obviously naive forms of this rhetoric would be difficult to explain with intellectual reasons. Perhaps the apparently indestructible character of the rhetoric of empowerment and participation should be

rather associated with the fact that this rhetoric has become an effective and indispensable component of the justifications appearing like a mantra in recognized textbooks as well as in applications for funds for research and training.

However, the rhetoric of disenchantment has also become idle, repeating the same arguments known for years, often focusing only on deconstruction and eschewing positive proposals. A good example are governmentality studies whose invaluable, even groundbreaking merit has been demonstrating the powerful role of soft indirect "government of self and others", to cite Foucault's innovative ideas again (Foucault, 2010), but which are now experiencing intellectual stagnation with evident lack of attempts to formulate new ideas. "[A] real 'industry' in social science" quickly developed around governmentality studies (Korvela, 2012: 75). As a result, readers may have been somewhat fed up with the idea of governmentality, repeatedly presented in a way that is unoriginal and redundant, where the only novelty is the application of this concept to the analysis of ever new areas of reality, predictable in terms of its theses.

An important characteristic of the rhetoric of disenchantment is its deconstruction of not only the rhetoric of empowerment and participation, but also the very idea of empowerment and participation. Here, I think, is the place for the "next step" set out in the ideas of Karl Mannheim (1936: 112; see also Kilminster, 1996: 366), namely developing new ideas on the basis of reflection on the status of disputes and discussions so far. The next step would involve maintaining scepticism about the rhetoric of empowerment and participation, or even ruthless strengthening of the criticism of this rhetoric, while attempting to defend the very idea of empowerment and participation. It seems, therefore, that we need to distance ourselves from the exhausted rhetoric and at the same time develop a new language that would still promote cultivation of such important values as empowerment, participation, and, last but not least, freedom.

To put it in a radically polemical way, one may ask if the concern expressed some 70 years ago by Horkheimer and Adorno is still topical: "It is in the nature of the calamitous situation existing today that even the most honorable reformer who recommends renewal in threadbare language reinforces the existing order he seeks to break by taking over its worn-out categorial apparatus and the pernicious power-philosophy lying behind it" (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002/1947: XVII).

Three general questions may arise in this context:

– What is the relationship between participatory approaches and neoliberal technologies of "the conduct of conduct"?
– What may a critical attitude mean today, especially with regard to the criteria of critical understanding?

– How it is possible to criticize the “threadbare language” and “worn-out categorial apparatus” of emancipatory *ideas* on the one hand and not to lose commitment to the subversive potential of emancipatory *ideals* on the other?

Conclusion

Shifts in the area of social work are linked to broader economic, social and cultural changes. What implications for social work arise from the preliminary examination of these links? It seems plausible to name a few, although the list will by no means be a complete one. Moreover, these conclusions come from the outside as it were, since I (as a sociologist) lack experience and expertise in the field of social work.

First of all, it is not so that social work (or psychotherapy or other helping professions) focused on participation and empowerment represent the “humanizing” opposition to the “dehumanized” economic and political reality. On the contrary, there are some important similarities between these, admittedly different, areas. There is a general consensus that anonymous rules of economic and political reality apply to the types of activity, types of individuals and types of their motivation to act, and thus do not allow individual differences between individuals to be taken into account. It may be somewhat surprising that there is no difference as regards promoting empowerment and participation, where “individuals’ personal understandings” of what empowerment and participation should be are ignored “in favor of a general and generic definition, against which people are assessed”. “In general, this leads us to think of people as interchangeable, which is another step on the road to a utilitarian mind-set that diminishes the individual in favor of the collective and denies the essential rights we all value as human beings.” I have cited the words of Mark D. White (2017: 40) on the subject of “happiness policy”, which in my opinion also apply to promoting empowerment and participation. It would be interesting to compare modern textbooks on social work with manuals of economic entrepreneurship and international development, as well as debates and controversies in these areas.

Secondly, the advocates of participatory approaches emphasize that an important benefit of this strategy is the ability to access the way of thinking and feeling - generally speaking, to access the knowledge of service users. This raises the question about the purpose of the use of this knowledge, that is the function of participation of service users. There are three key possibilities. The normatively declared variety claims that participation leads to empowerment. But it certainly does not have to be so. One of

the negative variants entails that participation does not serve any other purpose, so it is a purpose in itself, and in this sense is useless. Another negative variant, often pointed out by critics, points at an instrumentalization of the participation of service user in order to obtain better control of contact with service users. Then, paradoxically, participation does not contribute to the user-led social work, but on the contrary, reinforces the paternalistic provider-led model cloaked in the participatory and emancipatory rhetoric. The oft-quoted study by Barbara Cruikshank (1999) on the unsuccessful American programme "War on Poverty" from the 1960s, provides convincing evidence in this regard.

Thirdly, also important are neoliberal contexts (both in the narrower sense of economic initiatives, as well as in a broader one, concerning resourcefulness and initiative in all areas of life). If social work, focused on participation and empowerment, is addressed to people and groups affected by social exclusion, a doubt may arise with regard to the effectiveness of the actions taken. One of the reasons why people and groups are subject to social exclusion is precisely because they cannot find a place for themselves in a world dominated by the rhetoric of empowerment and participation. It is possible that in such a case a social worker would indulge in shamefully hidden direct interventions based on commands or prohibitions instead of promoting the rules of communication which are in fact compliant with professional training but are perceived by service users as foreign and artificial. And that could lead social workers to the systematic application of the principle of two separate forms of conscience: one that is declared (because otherwise it is not allowed), and the other is done (because otherwise it will not work).

Certainly a different point of view on the spheres of risk associated with participatory approaches to social work can be gleaned from practical experience and expertise in the field of social work. A good example of a specialized point of view can be the author of many books in the field of social work, Robert Adams, who (as an advocate of participatory approaches) provides a cautionary list of three forms of corruption of empowerment (Adams, 2008: 44ff). One might add that by analogy it seems plausible to speak about three forms of corruption of participation.

Robert Adams (2008) points out three risks:

– exploitation of service users, e.g. through tokenism (which partly overlaps with the aforementioned instrumentalization of knowledge of service users);
– professionalization of service users (here I am not sure if that necessarily means the corruption of empowerment; it seems that the professionalization of service users rather means that they become independent from service practitioners, which results in a loss of control over service users who are coping on their own); and

– imperialism by practitioners (which is a somewhat misleading term, probably pertaining to a situation in which self-help and user-led activities are considered by practitioners as competition and therefore are allowed to join the community of practitioners; this results in the growing presence of self-appointed experts, writers or media personalities, the phenomenon which might be explained by reference to broader trends in media culture, sometimes labelled as the cult of the amateur).

Finally, it needs to be underlined that examination of the areas of risk does not necessarily entail rejection of participatory approaches or the ideas of empowerment and participation as such. On the contrary, a critical reflection may be more constructive to participatory approaches than their uncritical implementation in practice.

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“Homeful – Homeless Box” project, Łódź, Poland, 2018 (Photo: Paula Wyciszkiewicz)
Educational Day in the village Konur in India, 2009 (Photo: Menaka)
Final day of the project week in Dornbirn, Austria, 2011 (Photo: Doris Böhler)

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