

Participatory Action Research for Educational and Social Inclusion

Experiences in scenarios of social segregation and unwanted isolation

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Abstract: The article compiles the knowledge generated in various areas of social exclusion such as social segregation and unwanted isolation, through participatory action research processes carried out in the context of the internships of the Master's degree in Community Participation and Development of the University of the Basque Country. It is the relationship networks that are established that give rise to new knowledge, based on the analysis of the feedback that arises between the most socially vulnerable, the associations in which they participate and university students and academics. Social and tangible challenges are set out on which to strengthen individual and collective competences and promote an awareness that has an impact on both personal change and the environment.

The systematization of the experiences and the critique of the process, carried out by the tutors with the role of researchers, allows us to identify the characteristics of the spaces from which values are developed and consensus on common interests, rights and needs is reached. An assessment of their own and common learning, by the different participating agents (educational, professional and community) highlights the weaknesses, strengths and opportunities that need to be faced in order to be competent in the development of social cohesion dynamics. The aim is to contribute to greater participation of people in vulnerable situations.

Keywords: Social transformation, social inclusion, action-research, citizen participation

La investigación acción participativa como metodología educativa y para la inclusión social

Resumen: El artículo recoge el conocimiento generado en diversas áreas de exclusión social como la segregación social y la soledad no deseada, a través de procesos de Investigación-acción participativa realizados en el contexto de las prácticas del Máster en Participación y desarrollo comunitario de la Universidad del País Vasco. Son las redes de relación que se establecen las que dan lugar a nuevos saberes, basados en el análisis de la retroalimentación surgida entre las personas socialmente más vulnerables, las asociaciones en las que participan y estudiantes y académicas universitarias. Se exponen desafíos sociales y tangibles, sobre los que fortalecer las competencias individuales y colectivas y promover una conciencia que impacte tanto en el cambio personal como en el entorno.

La sistematización de las experiencias y la crítica del proceso, realizados por las personas tutoras con el rol de investigadoras, permite identificar las características de los espacios desde los que se desarrollan valores y se llega a consensos de intereses, derechos y necesidades comunes. La valoración del aprendizaje, por parte de los diferentes agentes participantes (educativos, profesionales y comunitarios), pone de manifiesto a qué debilidades, fortalezas y oportunidades es necesario hacer frente, a la hora de ser competentes en el desarrollo de

dinámicas de cohesión social intentando incidir en la mayor participación de las personas en situación de vulnerabilidad.

Palabras clave: Transformación social, Inclusión social, Investigación-acción, Participación ciudadana

1. Introduction

The ethical and social commitment that needs to be included in research processes to ensure social inclusion calls for new sources of knowledge, as well as cultural knowledge, to be included under the principles of action research. The social groups and public entities working in the field of social exclusion must be connected so that those who are marginalised can be trained and become independent (Riedy et al., 2023). Learning and improving their skills are aspects that need to be addressed for organised participation.

This article analyses participatory processes developed between 2018 and 2024, in various areas of social segregation, in which environments were generated where life experiences were shared. The projects on which the article is based are a result of the collaboration between the academic committee of the Master's degree in Community Participation and Development of the UPV/EHU and EAPN-Euskadi's participation group, with specific topics being set for the students to develop during each course, under the supervision of professionals from the participating entities together with teachers of the Master's degree. The aim is twofold: on the one hand, the training of the people enrolled in the Master's degree and of all those involved; and, on the other, transformation, seeking, through participation, an empowerment of the groups furthest from power. Thus, tangible social challenges can be addressed, as well as those involving social exclusion and segregation, which require complex responses formulated with the help of the feedback between social organizations and society.

Last of all, the article monitors the emotional and relationship dynamics that arise in the participatory process as key aspects of the transformative power and of the development of both an individual and collective consciousness, with an aim to demonstrate how these elements can be a major contribution to the transformative potential of action research.

2. Conceptual theoretical framework

The concepts that inspired the processes were (i) community development in spaces of social exclusion, (ii) social segregation expressed in exclusion and unwanted isolation, and (iii) fraternity and emancipation in the dynamics of social transformation. These three concepts are related from the perspective of transformative action insofar as they propose a diagnosis (segregation understood particularly as fragmentation), a scenario (spaces of exclusion in community dynamics) and a proposal for transformative action (driven by the idea of fraternity and emancipation). Therefore, feedback processes between agents must be reinforced, so that dialogue and active participation are facilitated as a result of the interaction between the different levels and with the help of an integrated vision (Mollo Flores & Deroncele Acosta, 2022)