Participatory Action Research with and for the Roma Minority in Szeged, South-Hungary

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Overview

1. The Problem/Context

2. Means, Methods, Results

3. Evaluation of Results and Reflections

4. Concluding Remarks
1. The Problem/Context

1.1. The Context of the Research Project
   – PERARES

1.2. The Social Context: the Roma in Szeged
2. Means, Methods, Results

2.1. Objectives of the PAR project

– Explore human rights of Roma communities in their local context
– Initiate actions for and with Roma communities

2.2. Participants of the Research
2.3. The Research Process

1. Phase: (expert-elite)
   - Getting to know the situation of the local Roma community (the context)
   - Choosing a project idea to be established later
   - Revealing the needs of the inhabitants of the segregate regarding the chosen project ("tanoda")
   - Common decision regarding the use of the research results

Methods:
1. Desk research
2. Semi-structured interviews
3. Group discussion

Group discussion

2. Phase: (marginalized)

After...
3.1. Some theoretical and Empirical Dilemmas

– Who are the Roma people? Whom to work with?

– Problematizing classic dichotomies:
  • Elite (majority) vs. marginalized social groups
    – Are the local Roma doctor and politician marginalized just because they are Roma?
  • Integration vs. segregation
    – Does (educational) integration in itself have an intrinsic value?
3.2. Challenges Faced

• Who did we reach? How to reach the really marginalized?
  – Huge difference between the two phases
  – Still: are the needs of the community so unified as we see it?

• Within-community power structures and relations affecting the research

• Establishing an inclusive space for discussions
  – Difficulties of facilitation
  – Who has the real opportunity to speak?

• Where is the appropriate „mix” of participation and representation?
  – To what an extent the local Roma political leader represents the community?

• To what an extent researchers influence the research process and outcome?
3.3. Factors influencing the success of a PAR project

- The embeddedness of researchers
  - Researchers come from the same/other community/place as the stakeholders
  - The “civic roles” of the researchers
    - May have positive and negative effects regarding the success of PAR
    - Judgment is influenced by the success criteria of PAR

- Personal relationships
  - With the stakeholders (partners)
  - With the decision makers (within the community)
    - Cooperative vs. conflictual relationship
    - Partnership vs. competition

- Other external factors
  - Parallel “projects” within the community
  - Mobilizeable resources – e.g. the presence of cooperative experts
3.4. What is success in a PAR project?

• Frustrations: being a researcher and a social activist at the same time
  – Scientific success parallel with social failure?

• „Side activities” versus „main event”
  – Many „smaller” cooperative side activities but no „main event” yet

• Empowerment-based vs. project-based approach?
  – Possible conflict between establishing a single project and contributing to the empowerment of the community
4. Concluding Remarks

• PAR has the potential to transform science to serve (partly) local needs

• PAR has no automatic (positive) social effect
  – It is often not even unclear what is a positive social outcome

• The social outcome is influenced by many factors
  – Some of these are hardly controllable
  – Reflexivity from the side of the researcher is a key factor in reaching positive social outcome in PAR projects

• Researchers face extra challenges in PAR when working with marginalized social groups