

Participatory Action Research with Social Workers: The World Café Method to Share Critical Reflections and Possible Solutions on Working Practices in Migration Contexts

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Abstract : Over the past two decades, migration has gained central importance in the global landscape. Europe hosts the largest number of migrants, totaling 92.9 million people, approximately 37.4 million of whom are regular residents within the European Union's borders. Reception services and different modes of management have received increasing attention precisely because of the complexity of the phenomenon, which necessarily impacts the wider community. Indeed, opening a reception center in an area entails major challenges for that context, for the community that inhabits it, and for the people who use that service. Questioning the strategies needed to offer a functional reception service means listening to the different actors involved who daily face the difficulties involved in working in the field. Recognizing the importance of the professional figures who work closely with migrant people, each with their own specific experiences has led researchers to study and analyze the different types of reception centers and their management. This has led to the development of intervention models and best practices in various countries. However, research from this perspective is still limited, especially in Italy. From this theoretical framework, this study aims to bring out an innovative qualitative tool, such as the world café, the work experiences of 29 social workers working in shelters in the Italian context. Most of the participants were female and lived in the Northwest regions of Italy. Through this tool, the aim was to bring out and share reflections on the critical issues encountered in working in reception centers, with a view to identifying possible solutions for better management of services. The World café represents a tool used in participatory action research that promotes dialogue among participants through the sharing of reflections and ideas. In fact, from critical reflections, participants are invited to identify and share possible solutions to provide a more functional service with benefits to the entire community. Therefore, this research, through the innovative technique of the World café, aims to promote critical thinking processes that can help participants find solutions that can be introduced into their work contexts or proposed to decision-makers. Specifically, the findings shed light on several issues, including complex bureaucratic procedures, insufficient project planning, and inefficiencies in the services provided to migrants. These concerns collectively contribute to what participants perceive as a disorganized and uncoordinated system. In addition, the study explores potential solutions that promote more efficient networking practices, coordinated project management, and a more positive approach to cultural diversity. The main results obtained will be discussed with a focus on critical reflections and possible solutions identified.

Keywords : participatory action research, world café method, reception services, migration contexts, social workers, Italy

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