

Presentazione del numero. ***Empowerment and social inclusion***

by Immacolata Di Napoli* and Sara Alfieri**

Empowerment and social inclusion are two highly relevant issues for community psychology.

Based on the Psycinfo database, we found 17.522 researches using the keyword “empowerment” and 5.575 using “social inclusion”. However, only 118 of them contain both of these keywords: 92 academic papers, 24 chapters in volumes, 2 dissertations¹.

Community psychologists have significantly contributed to promote multilevel empowerment and social inclusion, developing innovative theory and intervention strategies. However, it is interesting that the term inclusion does not appear in the analytic index of the APA Handbook of Community Psychology (APA, 2017) even if it includes a full chapter of Keys, Mc Connell, Motley, Liao and Mc Auliff entitled “The what, the how, and the who of empowerment: reflections on an intellectual history”.

Based on this, we begin this special issue with some of the final words of that chapter that may connect empowerment issues to inclusion: «Regarding who becomes empowered, we (Keys *et al.*, 2017) suggest the following: a) Explore empowerment with an intersectional lens to better understand how different axes of oppression, taken together in different contexts, affect the development of and manifestation of empowerment among members of multiply marginalized groups; b) Consider empowerment throughout the life span for those at society’s margins. Most empowerment work focuses on youth or adults. Some work has been done with children and little with older

* Department of Humanities, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, via Porta di Massa 1, 80133 Napoli, immacolata.dinapoli@unina.it

** Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, L.go Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano, sara.alfieri@unicatt.it

adults; c) Consider the powerful as well as those at the margins (cf. McDonald & Keys, 2008)» (2017, p. 228). So, the authors suggest an integrative global understanding of empowerment. Therefore, this issue focused on the interplay of empowerment and social inclusion strengths community psychology perspective.

Empowerment has developed gradually since the '70s of the last century but only in the last 40 years the studies on this issue have increased in social science field (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1995).

The process of empowerment involves one or more levels. Infact according to Zimmerman (1995) the empowerment is a multidimensional construct that considers different levels (individual, organizational and community). The empowering process, addressed to individual and/or community level, increases the awareness of choice possibility and intervention in problem solving and full comprehension of the context. It also increases knowledge and perception of one's own abilities, motivation, control and critical awareness.

Empowerment and social inclusion are closely interconnected.

The social inclusion cannot be reached without power (Prillelntesky, 2010). In fact, a relevant resource for social inclusion is the acknowledgment of the power of each individual and how the power is acquired, kept and used.

Community psychology is always characterized by a collaborative approach in research and intervention. This approach fosters empowerment and capacity building processes (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2017). It underlines how essential the collaboration among the researcher and stakeholders in developing research priorities and evaluation is (Kelly, 1970; Trickett & Lustman, 1977).

Furthermore, the collaborative approach to research promotes transformative and emancipatory actions including vulnerable population (such as research collaborators) allowing them to be engaged in a co-construction of knowledge process, accepting, respecting, and validating their voice (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020).

In Europe, the first community psychology congress was on Social Empowerment and was organized in Rome in 1995 by Caterina Arcidiacono and Bianca Gelli. At this congress Donata Francescato introduced empowerment in an international perspective: Jim Orford (UK), José Ornelas (Pt), Wolfgang Stark (Ge), Antonio Martin (Sp) and Arvid Skutle (No) discussed this new topic and its implication for psychology and social change; just to name a few, Piero Amerio, Bruna Zani, Massimo Santinello, Fulvia Signani, and Vittorio Cigoli, increased their reciprocal research and interconnect action

at national level (Arcidiacono, Gelli & Putton, 1996). At that time the congress traced a path to promote fairness and wellbeing beyond solidarity. Social empowerment is a “value” and a goal as well as a procedure and intervention method. The keywords of its feature are self-esteem, power, participation and fulfilment of desire.

In the same years Julian Rappaport, interviewed by Donata Francescato, presented his seminal work on Empowerment in Italy (see video in: <http://www.communitypsychology.eu>)

Moreover, to develop aims and values of this new construct, Community psychologists achieved a high level of networking, through creating the ENCP and the European Community Psychology Association (ECPA) in 1996 and developing national associations, such as Sipco (Società Italiana di Psicologia di Comunità).

This special issue collects five researches carried out in Italy (Northern, Central and Southern Italy were involved); the researches enrich the literature on processes with interesting reflections on empowerment processes and social inclusion of the target groups (immigrants, university students, young Neet, etc.), considered in the different experiences.

The contributions also represent examples of empowerment processes at different levels as individual, organizational and community are included.

The first article (Curiale, Lenzi, Gaboardi, Vieno & Santinello, 2020) discuss the effects and the peculiarities of the *Housing First Program* addressed to the homeless. The research particularly underscores the impact that the choice possibility, characterizing this program, has on psychiatric condition. *Housing first Program* is a well-known International project, lead in Europe by the Portuguese team directed by José Ornelas. In the light of the empowerment at individual level, the research shows the positive effects of the freedom of choice and the sense of perceived control over one’s life on the mental health of the homeless. Lenzi *et al.* strengthen the importance of the sense of control and the choice possibility in promoting individual empowerment and psychological and personal well-being in particular for groups with high vulnerability such as the homeless.

Meanwhile, the second article (Alfieri, Marzana, Calloni, Pugliese, Pozzi & Marta, 2020) focus on a phenomenon that strongly affects our country: NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). These young people are not only at risk of exclusion from the adult world, in which they have difficulty entering, but also at risk of compromising their health and personal well-being. The total inactivity from the training or work world may have negative consequences such as poor or difficult relationships, lack of social and politics participation, poor physical and mental health, drug abuse and crime, etc. The authors analyse some ActionAid projects that were carried

out in Lombardy Region to reflect on the elements of success in order to identify “good practices” of preventing and contrasting the phenomenon of NEETs, that represents a challenge for our society. The study shows the importance of providing young NEETs with opportunities for growth and experimentation in “protected” contexts.

Furthermore, the third article (Cecchini, Guidi & Meringolo, 2020) illustrate the peculiarities and opportunities of the service-learning experience perceived by young university students. The contribution highlights that this experience promotes a process of empowerment, the acquisition of professional skills the increase of their civic sense and the acquisition of a greater awareness of the existing resources in the contexts, in which they conducted their experience. So, the authors suggest that service-learning experiences represent an important resource and an opportunity to promote not only professional skills but also behaviours aimed at civic sense of participation. Therefore, the contribution invites us to reflect on the connection between academic world and territorial context in professional terms and as an opportunity to empower collective behaviour and to promote the good at the community level. Service Learning is a worldwide project that Wolfgang Stark highlights emphasizing that

«Students in Service-Learning Programs attain academic credit based on the work they undertake within the community and the knowledge they harness from the experience. Research indicates that Service Learning strengthens learning, facilitates the development of professional competences, and improves the students’ motivation, critical thinking and social commitment, as well as social relations in the class room. It is a tool for democracy and sustainability, as it increases the effectiveness of the education for a sustainable development while focusing on diversity, multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, human rights and marginalized groups within society» (2014).

The last two articles of the special issues invite the reader to reflect on the social dynamics among the groups that live in the territorial co-contexts. In particular the fourth article (Procentese, Gargiulo & Gatti, 2020) deepen the social dynamic that underlies the relationship among actively involved groups, other citizens and institutions. The research collected the interview of a group of citizens socially and politically engaged in their communities of residence. Research allows us to grasp the complex dynamics of acknowledgment of collective actions. The authors argue on the central role of the perception regarding acknowledgment of their active role in favour of the community, discussing widely that this is an essential condition to improve a sense of responsible togetherness. Therefore, the contribution also offers important suggestions to institutional representatives on the importance of

attributing value and supporting the collective actions of local groups to promote collective visions and community well-being.

Last but not least, the fifth article (Tartaglia, Rollero & Bergagna, 2020) discusses the delicate issue of Italian citizens' attitudes towards refugees by analysing the variables that can hinder a hostile attitude. The central result of the work is the important role of ideological factors in defining attitudes towards refugees. The article urges community psychologists to promote interventions fostering social and inclusion values that positively impact individual attitudes towards others in general and refugees in particular. This culture is centred on social values oriented towards solidarity and inclusion to favour positive attitudes towards Others at community level. The contribution therefore invites community psychologists to reflect on the importance of promoting complex intervention for the promotion of social values. The lesson of this issue is that inclusion is not only related to human diversity, social discrimination but also “holy” wars as well as group oppression (Patel & Tabb Sue, 2017); in an empowerment approach, community psychology has to deal with effects of social unfairness and promotion of empowerment of those left behind.

We are confident that this special issue will expand knowledge suggesting how community psychology works to promote the sense of belonging, trust and hope in the different communities where people live to overcome any kind of social exclusion and powerlessness.

References

- Alfieri, S., Marzana, D., Calloni, L., Pugliese, V., Pozzi, M. & Marta, E. (2020). Come riattivare i giovani NEET Alcuni spunti di riflessione a partire da “buone prassi”. *Psicologia di Comunità, 1*, 26-44.
- Arcidiacono, C., Gelli, B., Signani, F. & Putton, A. (Eds.) (1996). *Empowerment sociale*. Roma: FrancoAngeli.
- Bond, M.A., Serrano-García, I.E., Keys, C.B. & Shinn, M.E. (2017). *APA handbooks in psychology®. APA handbook of community psychology: Theoretical foundations, core concepts, and emerging challenges* (pp. 213-231). American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/14953-010
- Cecchini, C., Guidi, E. & Meringolo, P. (2020). Evaluating activities in Service-Learning. *Rivista Psicologia di Comunità, 1*, 45-63.
- Curiale, C., Lenzi, M., Gaboardi, M., Vieno, A. & Santinello, M. (2020). Libertà di scelta e senso di controllo: impatto sui sintomi psichiatrici in persone senza dimora. *Psicologia di Comunità, 1*, 9-25.
- Kelly, J.G. (1970). Antidotes for arrogance: Training for community psychology. *American Psychologist, 25*(6), 524-531. doi: 10.1037/h0029484

- Keys, C.B., McConnell, E., Motley, D., Liao, C.L. & McAuliff, K. (2017). The what, the how, and the who of empowerment: Reflections on an intellectual history. In M.A. Bond, I. Serrano-García, C.B. Keys & M. Shinn (Eds.), *APA handbooks in psychology®. APA Handbook of Community Psychology: Theoretical foundations, core concepts, and emerging challenges* (pp. 213-231). American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/14953-010
- McDonald, K.E. & Keys, C.B. (2008). How the powerful decide: Access to research participation by those at the margins. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(1-2), 79. doi: 10.1007/s10464-008-9192-x
- Patel, S.G., Tabb, K. & Stanley, S. (2017). Diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion. In M.G. Bond, I. Serrano Garcia and C. Keys (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Community Psychology*, vol.2b Methods for Community Research and Action for Diverse Groups and Issues (pp. 253-273), APA Washington: DC.
- Perkins, D.D. & Zimmerman, M.A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 569-579. doi: 10.1007/BF02506982
- Prilleltensky, I. (2010). Child wellness and social inclusion: Values for action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46(1-2), 238-249. doi: 10.1007/s10464-010-9318-9
- Procentese, F., Gargiulo, A. & Gatti, F. (2020). Local Groups' Actions to Develop A Sense of Responsible Togetherness. *Psicologia di Comunità*, 1, 64-78.
- Rappaport, J. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 795-807. doi: 10.1007/BF02506992
- Stark, W. (2014). Spokesperson, Higher Education Network for Social Responsibility, Germany member of Europe Engage – Developing a Culture of Civic Engagement through Service Learning within Higher Education in Europe [reference 2014-1-es01-ka203-004798]
- Suarez-Balcazar, Y. (in press). Meaningful Engagement in Research: Community Residents as Co-creators of Knowledge. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. doi: 10.1002/ajcp.12414
- Tartaglia, S., Rollero, C. & Bergagna, E. (2020). Attitudes toward refugees in the Italian context. *Psicologia di Comunità*, 1, 79-92.
- Trickett, E.J. & Lustman, N.M. (1977). Research, knowledge, and professional growth. *Community Psychology in Transition*. New York: Hemisphere.
- Viswanathan, M., Ammerman, A., Eng, E., Garlehner, G., Lohr, K.N., Griffith, D. ... & Webb, L. (2004). *Community-based participatory research: Assessing the evidence: Summary. In AHRQ evidence report summaries*. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US).