FROM DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TOWARD TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES: CONCEPTUAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORKS OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN EUROPE

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Community Psychology in this paper is analysed as a system´s view towards global and local challenges. Based on the rich body of disciplinary knowledge and skills, transdisciplinary potentials and perspectives of community psychology will be outlined. The paper follows a line of arguments that community psychology has the option to play an important role to help to design a civil society based on trust, mutual support and individual and collective empowerment. Community psychology beyond disciplinary approaches has the potential for a new transdisciplinary science desperately needed to build the civil society of the future.

Keywords: community psychology, linking science, tacit knowledge

1.   Introduction

In the process of globalisation, one can find contradictory movements: the erosion of traditional community structures is alienating both individuals and social networks. At the same time for many continuous change processes in social life and meeting new people and cultures both in reality and the virtual world is both a burden and a chance to discover new opportunities and to develop innovative ideas. By analysing risks and opportunities of globalisation, eminent scholars like Anthony Giddens (1999), Zygmunt Bauman (2000), Ulrich Beck (2005) or recently Yuval Harari (2017) all agree, that active community building processes in order to develop a culture of 'learning communities' will be indispensable to overcome the risks and dangers of globalisation. Castells´ (2000) analysis of the 'network society' already emphasized the need for a culture of community which both on the local and the virtual level will determine our future communication. Francescato (2017, 2018) recently outlined challenges and potentials for community psychology in a globalised world.

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Hence, if community psychology has the option to play an important role to shape the future of our societies, the field has to readjust from a traditional model of a psychological discipline (equal with other sub-disciplines like social, clinical or organizational psychology) towards a systemic and transdisciplinary social science. The notion of community as traditional neighbourhood then will change towards a systemic view of the role of community building in society, organizations, (real and virtual) social networks and on the level of civil society (citizen groups, local and global coalitions and alliances) on the local level and beyond (see Nelson *&* Prilleltensky, 2004; Senge 1990; Tomai et al., 2010; Wildemeersch & Stroobants, 2003). Social networks, families, local communities and organizations like business companies and Non-Governmental-Organizations (NGOs) already are and will be challenged by

- continuing global migration processes and its effects on local communities,
- the (psycho)social consequences of (man-made) environmental crises,
- the need to adjust to considerable demographic changes, and
- the quest for a new social justice in the world.

If traditional structures are eroding – and this is the case both on macro- and micro-levels - there will be an urgent need not only to develop and maintain shared values in society, but also to design new and innovative community solutions together with all actors in society. Being a community psychologist in Europe therefore is a quest for new ways to deal with psychosocial problems not only on the individual level. We also need to analyse and search for potentials and challenges of people in social settings and of the settings themselves. Community psychology in Europe in this sense has always been a quest for a political identity of being a psychologist who wants to improve social justice and individual well-being in a complex world. Developing this point of view has never been easy - given a traditional perspective of psychology, driven by sub-disciplines and dominated by both quasi-experimental approaches and by clinical psychological approaches focused on the individual.

Michael Frese (2006) stated that psychology today needs a currency that is as important and respected as money. Therefore, psychology should develop well-being and happiness as a psychological currency in contrast to money and economic goods only. In order to achieve this, psychology needs to have an impact in all spheres of social life – community and social systems, economy, politics, etc. Individual well-being and collective happiness and social justice are important elements of a psychological currency, which should be more important than money. Many multidisciplinary studies (for example Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009 – for many others) have shown that the key to individual well-being means to maintain and nurture social networks, a strong and healthy community, and a social system which is enhancing empowerment processes. Therefore, asking "What if Community Psychology Mattered in the World?" can show another substantial category for a social currency developed by community psychology. To do this, European Community Psychology needs to be based on the idea of a transdisciplinary science, linking different disciplines and using the knowledge and craftsmanship of different areas, and the professional capabilities and the experiential knowledge of specialist practitioners as well as the practical wisdom of neighbourhood groups and of everyday life (Stark, 2015).

2.   Early Catalysts for European Community Psychology

A transdisciplinary view of Community psychology as a linking science can be identified from the very beginning and has had many origins before it was called community psychology (Bennett et al., 1966). To name a few: community organizing (Alinsky, 1989) and the Community Mental Health Movement (Bloom, 1973) in the US, Conscientization (Freire, 1996) and Action Research (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991) in Latin America. In Europe, Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld and Hans Zeisel's (1972) groundbreaking long-term study on the effects of unemployment on the community, which was conducted in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Austria still is well-known as the prototype for transdisciplinary community-based research. The Italian Democratic Psychiatry Movements (Basaglia, 1968) in Europe have influenced many community psychologists in various countries (among others Britain, Germany, Portugal) to rethink and re-design their countries´ mental health policy and institutions. Equivalently, many political movements have had considerable impact on community psychology research and practice: The Student´s Movements of the 1960s in many countries have challenged old hierarchies and paternalism; Feminist Movements and Gay Rights Movements raised important issues which changed current gender relationships in a fundamental way; Equal Rights for Handicapped Persons, Survivors of Psychiatric Hospitals and many more fought for the civil rights and psychological rehabilitation of the forgotten. The dynamics of civil and political movements show clearly that community psychology in Europe has been influenced by factors often beyond academic debates and disciplines.

2.1 Community Psychology as Praxis and as an Academic Discipline

Community Psychology in many European countries was focused on psychosocial action rather than the development of a single academic discipline. Therefore, in many cases, traditional psychological disciplines have been paralleled by CP approaches in the academic arena (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain – see Roehrle, Akhurst, Lawthom & Arcidiacono, 2019). If one compares community psychology to other psychological disciplines in Europe, the picture is quite a paradox: Community psychology on one hand looks like a small island of science and practice not being very influential within the large discipline of psychology. But, at the same time, discourses and research topics originally started in community psychology seem to have a broad impact on many disciplines. One of the reasons for this paradoxical picture is the basic foundation of community psychology in Europe: the field conceptually always has oriented itself towards a systemic view of social dynamics in the world by integrating individual and group levels such as community, organizational and societal levels of analysis. Because the idea of community psychology is transdisciplinary by nature, its identity – especially in Europe - bears a wide variety of regional and individual scholarly stories and tries to integrate personal value systems and scientifically based interdisciplinary research and practice within its boundaries.

The specific European social science background (Tönnies, 2001; Frankfurt Critical School – Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997; Habermas, 1981; or the French sociological-philosophical approach - among others - Derrida, 1981; Latour, 2005) supported an approach toward a critical

identity of social science based on qualitative research. Although this mindset has been widely influential in community psychology debates in Europe, its approach has never been accepted as *the* community psychology approach, and in most cases has been dominated by the positivist approaches in academic settings. The debate between positivist and critical community psychology unintentionally weakened community psychology both as a discipline and as a movement. Consequently, although community psychology in Europe has been and is part of psychology as a discipline in some universities[1], only in a few countries one can find an option to build a professional career based on community psychology. This is why, to date, community psychologists in Europe for many professionals and academics are viewed as outsiders, and – in turn - many European community psychologists act as non-conformists.

Julian Rappaport in 1977 summarized the idea of community psychology: "...the real key to social change is in the attitudes, values, goals and political-economic ideology and social policy of which institutions themselves are composed and on which organisations are based" (Rappaport, 1977, p. 180). Although Rappaport´s systemic view is in the core of community psychology´s belief system and has been developed for 30-40 years, it never has grown to be dominant in teaching and research. Having to survive in an academic world of distinct disciplines, more than 80% of research and practice in community psychology still is restricted to individual or group levels, and only a very small part is using a genuine systemic approach. Especially today, the transdisciplinary concept of community psychology in Europe has the potential to be one of the most powerful applied psychologies in civil society. By linking

- the strengths of different traditional disciplines (psychology, sociology, organizational science, anthropology, art, educational science, social work and social medicine)
- the spheres of academic science and the practical areas, addressing real world challenges of our time, and
- the analytical view on the past and creative ideas for the future.

Community Psychology is going beyond traditional applied sciences: it is not only applying scientific results for praxis, but adds new questions and ideas on individual, social and societal issues by using systematically a transdisciplinary approach. This is one of the reasons why the European Federation of Psychologist´s Association (the umbrella of all national psychology associations in Europe) installed Community Psychology as one of six Standing Committees in European psychology.

3. Community Psychology in Europe Today: Theoretical/Methodological Background and Professional Perspectives

If one wants to identify the most powerful theoretical backgrounds of community psychology on a global scale, the concept of the 'sense of community' (Sarason 1974; McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and the 'empowerment discourse' (Rappaport 1977, 1981) will pop-up. In Europe, the

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[1] CP is regular part of undergraduate training or in graduate programs in psychology in major universities only in Italy (among others in Bologna, Catania, Firenze, Lecce, Napoli, Roma, Torino), Portugal (Lisbon, Porto), Britain (Birmingham, Brighton, Leicester, London, Manchester, York), Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Sevilla) and Norway (Bergen, Oslo). In other countries there are 'CP-islands' in some universities (Romania, Poland) or community psychologists are part of faculty in health, social, clinical psychology or social work (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France)

sense of community (SoC) concept has been widely recognized, but also has been complemented by Antonovsky´s concept of 'salutogenesis' (1987), which is an important basis for health promotion and community psychology in general.

The discourse on empowerment processes (Rappaport, Swift & Hess, 1984) in Community Psychology has been influential for many practical areas in community mental health and social work, psychiatry, community development and organizational science in Europe. The power of the empowerment concept is based on the ability to link different disciplines and their viewpoints on society. In social policy, the concept of empowerment has been adopted in various legislations in Europe and developed as a synonym for innovative approaches to social challenges and the growth of a consumer- and prosumer-oriented civil society. To use the dynamics of empowerment processes in order to enhance well-being and growth not only in individuals but also in social systems, it is important to link the different levels of empowerment (individuals – group – organization) (Stark, 1996). Empowerment as a concept has been adopted in various disciplines (sociology, management studies, software development, women´s studies…) in Europe (see as one example for many, Dominelli, 1999) but it always has been mingled with other representational concepts in social science.

Although the empowerment discourse has been extremely powerful in recent decades and had an impact not only on Community Psychology, but also on other disciplines and areas of work, the concept from its start still remains more as a professional attitude than a professional methodology or technique. As a value-based approach it may serve as an important basis to form an identity of European community psychology. But, in order to establish a technology for empowerment, it also helps to cross disciplinary boundaries: Christopher Alexander´s (Alexander, Ishikawa & Silverstein, 1977) seminal book, *'A Pattern Language'*, has been one of the most influential books in architecture, city planning and community development: although very few community psychologists ever have read the book, it also hides some important basic ideas for community psychology on establishing and nurturing a community, and offers a technology based on the patterns approach (Leitner, 2015; Stark et al., 2018) which has the potential to serve as a general language for empowerment. The idea of a pattern language has been adopted in many disciplines (one of the most important being software development, which developed many ideas on participation processes both in technological and pedagogical settings – see Gabriel (2002), but has a potential not yet discovered systematically: to link the wisdom of different disciplines in order to understand and practice the art of empowerment and community building from different perspectives and to develop its variety of potentials. Douglas Schuler (2008) and his *PublicSphere Project* (http://publicsphereproject.org) in the US have started to develop a pattern language for organizing and community building which could ignite a move to develop a pattern language for empowerment and community building based on the scientific knowledge of community psychology together with other academic and practical fields. The UK-born 'Transition Town'-Movement (https://transitionnetwork.org) is based on a pattern language to create sustainable communities (Hopkins, 2011).

As a field and practice even more influential for community psychology in Europe than the empowerment approach, is participatory action research (PAR). PAR (Argyris & Schön, 1989; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008) and its off-springs (Bradbury, 2015; Sherman & Torbert, 2000) are challenging the positivist identity of psychology in a more fundamental way: PAR not only calls for a different approach toward research, but also for a community-based research process, which puts citizens in an active role as active researchers of their local and regional environment.

3.1 Professional Community Psychology - Both Applied Science and Politically Consciousness for Society?

When the debate about psychological licensing started in Europe in the late 1990s, community psychology in many European countries chose not to be integrated. Although there has been considerable deliberation in some countries, community psychology always has been closer to other disciplines and movements (see above), than to traditional psychological fields like clinical, social and the like.

In many European countries there is a typical struggle for professional endorsement, which also means a struggle for public resources. As soon as public institutions endorse a disciplinary field or professional practice, public democratic reasoning leads to an obligation to offer public resources for professionalization to some extent – either to support schools and education, to reimburse services, or even to include community psychologists into pension plans at the end of their career.

As soon as we realize the implications of the process of (and struggle for) professionalization of community psychology, issues on the identity of community psychology both as a science and a practical field can be raised, which may be applicable beyond Europe also. If we share the vision of community psychology being one of the major psychological disciplines, community psychology looks like an island of science and practice that is not very influential within the discipline of psychology. There may be ways to strengthen the process of professionalization, but the history of US-community psychology (and parts of the world too: Australia, Latin America, some countries in Europe) show that professionalization within the traditional structure of psychology bears the danger of losing major parts of community psychology's identity: Community psychology always has oriented itself towards a systemic view of social dynamics in the world by integrating individual, group, community, organizational and societal levels of analysis. This is why community psychology's identity bears a wide variety of regional and individual scholarly stories, and is trying to integrate personal value systems and scientifically-based interdisciplinary research and practice within its boundaries. This is in the core of community psychology's belief system as it has developed over the last 30 years in Europe.

Especially today, the transdisciplinary concept of community psychology has the potential to be one of the most powerful applied sciences in civil society, if not tamed by professional dynamics. By linking the strengths of different traditional disciplines (psychology, sociology, organizational science, anthropology, educational science, social work and social medicine), spheres of academic science and everyday community challenges of our time, and the analytical view on the past and creative ideas for the future, community psychology is going beyond traditional applied sciences: community psychology is not only applying scientific results for praxis, but can add crucial questions and ideas about individual, social and societal issues. By using the potentials of a transdisciplinary approach as a new challenge in science, strengthening its political power beyond academic and professional institutionalization, and integrating the 'tacit' knowledge of the community and thereby consolidating its identity as a 'real' participative science and practice, community psychology can go steps beyond professionalization.

In order to unfold its potentials, community psychology as a linking science and practice (Stark, 2011) needs to unleash itself from the limits of traditional academic disciplines and professional taxonomies: the social network and social support research in the 1970s already

brought close collaboration between psychology, sociology and anthropology, and developed tentative links to virtual networks in computer science. The discourse on empowerment processes has been influential for many practical areas in community mental health and social work, psychiatry, community development and organizational science. In social policy the concept of empowerment has been adopted in various legislations and developed as a synonym for innovative approaches to social challenges and the growth of a consumer- and prosumer-oriented civil society.

Community psychology's traditional values (like social change and transformation) and current challenges today require more than working in a local community and/or improving the social situation of specific groups. While this work will remain an important core part of European Community Psychology, the field should empower itself to use its competencies to develop social innovations and look at emerging futures by developing shared goals (and take shared risks) by collaborating with other disciplines, companies or other actors in society.

4. Community Building in a Civil Society

For community psychology, therefore, it always has been necessary to develop an enhanced identity based on the field´s core values, which is able to meet the challenges of a complex and globalised world. The steps described below - based on the guiding principles developed by an international group of community psychologist (adapted from Wolff, 2006) - may serve as a guideline for future research and action:
 (1) Community psychology will become increasingly global in nature. Local communities are increasingly important because they are affected by global forces. Community psychology must collaborate with communities to effectively adapt to such changes.
 (2) A community psychology approach, by definition, must be an approach informed by multiple perspectives. Thus, the future of community psychology will require partnerships with other disciplines and community stakeholders. Community Psychology will have to partner with others while maintaining its own unique identity.
 (3) Community psychology will become more engaged in the formation and institutionalization of economic and social policy. These policies will be based upon the values that are at the core of our discipline and will incorporate psychological principles. Involvement with policy is consistent with community psychology's ecological perspective on community, which recognizes the importance of macrosystem factors, such as business and policy, on communities.
 (4) Community psychology will become a field of research and action that makes a significant difference on issues of social change by promoting social justice. Social justice is defined as conditions that promote equitable distribution of resources, equal opportunity for all, non-exploitation, prevention of violence, and active citizenry.
 If the global, demographic and economic change we are witnessing is requiring a new perception of civil society, the role of community psychology is to initiate and maintain dialogue and mutual support with all actors interested in social change and social innovation. Therefore, community psychology should start to be a real 'linking science' by:

- Discovering empowerment patterns between individuals, groups and social structures not only in the neighbourhood, but in all kind of settings where people work and live together (companies, virtual communities, social policy).
- Learning not only from the past, but sense emerging futures by learning across generations, cultures, and institutions.
- Establishing new intersectoral alliances and test new forms of collaboration between different actors in society.
- Enabling mutual risk-taking through experimental settings and program evaluation.

This requires not only 'incremental', step-by-step social innovation within a discipline, but also forms of profound, more 'radical social action' for which collaboration with other disciplines and actors are needed.

Dan Stokols (2006), as one of very few community psychologists, has promoted the idea of a science of transdisciplinary action research. Given the global and complex nature of problems and challenges this approach can use original strengths of community psychology and offer new potentials for the enhancement of the field as part of a transdisciplinary, and, consequently, political movement of social responsibility. There is a need for adequate institutional facilities through which a science-society dialogue can be established. In a transdisciplinarity laboratory, scientists form various disciplines and non-scientists cooperate for a certain period of time, aspire to a mutual learning process and conduct transdisciplinary research.

To see the larger picture, it helps to ask the systemic question of 'What is missing?' Professional lobbying as part of the struggle for professional endorsement may be useful and needed, but especially in community psychology, one may miss community members or activists who are part of the struggle. Especially in Europe, with a political backbone of the 'European Community', Community Psychology has the potential to develop a social science-based 'community lobbying':

1) Community members should play key roles, because they are major actors in a political game, which is all about communities and humans in need. Community Psychology in Europe therefore should be an active part of building and maintaining a sense of community both on a local, regional and trans-national scale. Community Psychology therefore can play the role 'science for the community' - a science how to collaborate between individuals, groups, cultures.

2) A transdisciplinary concept of community psychology has the potential to be one of the most powerful applied sciences in civil society, if not tamed by professional and academic dynamics. We need to link the strengths of different traditional disciplines (psychology, social work, education, sociology, organizational science, anthropology, and medicine) to find solutions beyond a neoliberal social policy of austerity. By linking academic science with everyday community wisdom, as well as the analytical view of the past and creative ideas for the future, we can inspire and push community psychology to go beyond traditional applied sciences.

3) We can use a transdisciplinary approach to challenge science and to strengthen our political power beyond academic and professional institutionalization. If we integrate the 'tacit' knowledge of the community, we will be able to consolidate our identity as a 'real' participative science and practice. On the basis of this, community psychology can take major steps beyond professionalization and research as a discipline toward a science for community building in civil society.

If we look carefully in both our local and regional communities and in other disciplines, we may realize that the building blocks for a new science of Community Research and Community Action, are already there, waiting to be used…

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