



Symposium 8:  
Methodological challenges and opportunities in social work  
research and knowledge production together with professional  
practitioners and user groups with restricted autonomy

Introduction

Symposium 16 European Conference for Social Work Research

Professor Tor Slettebø, VID Specialized University, Faculty of Social Studies, Oslo, Norway

# The research project (2018-2022)

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Challenges of participation (CHAPAR-project) is a four year research project carried out in a close collaboration between Oslo Metropolitan University, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and VID Specialized University

Financed by the Norwegian Research Council

Background: A research pilot where the research focus and questions were developed in close partnership between Service Users, Practitioners, Students and Researchers

The project consists of altogether eight case studies throughout the country



# Research questions

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- What are the barriers to individual and collective participation when service users autonomy is challenged/restricted?
- What are the possibilities for increased individual and collective participation for these service users?
- What are the barriers and possibilities for co-producing programmes for the education of professional practitioners about collective and individual user participation for these groups?
- How can a collaborative approach facilitate the development and co-creation of knowledge among the stakeholders?



# Expansion of existing knowledge

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- Increase our understanding of challenges and possibilities for participation when user's autonomy is restricted and to identify drivers and barriers across sectors
- Develop novel models for participation
- Explore innovative methods to study the experiences of users
- Study the impact of the participation in the case studies



# Methodological challenges and opportunities

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The challenges and opportunities studying user participation together with professional practitioners and user groups with restricted autonomy in the project will be presented in the various case studies that are involved in the project.

The next step will be to do an analysis across the case studies of factors promoting/preventing user participation among users with restricted autonomy.



# Case studies

Sissel Seim, Oslo Metropolitan University, co-researcher and co-projectleader in the CHAPAR project and moderator for the discussion

Research circles with substance user and families with in contact with child welfare and social services by Lillian Bruland Selseng and Tone Jørgensen

Dialogue conferences when cooperating with service users (young immigrants and refugees) and professionals by Monica Kjørstad and Ariana Guilherme Fernandes

Methodological challenges and opportunities cooperating with users with profound intellectual disability and dementia by Anita Gjermestad and Anita Strøm

Action research and collective action in cooperation with persons who are homeless and/or substance users by Håvard Aaslund

Methodological challenges and opportunities with collective participation, results for a literature review by Jan Marius K. Gathen

Socio-material conditions for participation in Norwegian labour and welfare services by Kjell-Einar Barnsnes



For further information about the project,  
the case studies and researchers:

<https://www.chapar.no>





Western Norway  
University of  
Applied Sciences

Methodological challenges &  
opportunities when cooperating with  
professionals and users

Examples from research circles with  
substance users and families in contact  
with child welfare and social welfare.

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Tone Jørgensen & Lilian Bruland Selseng

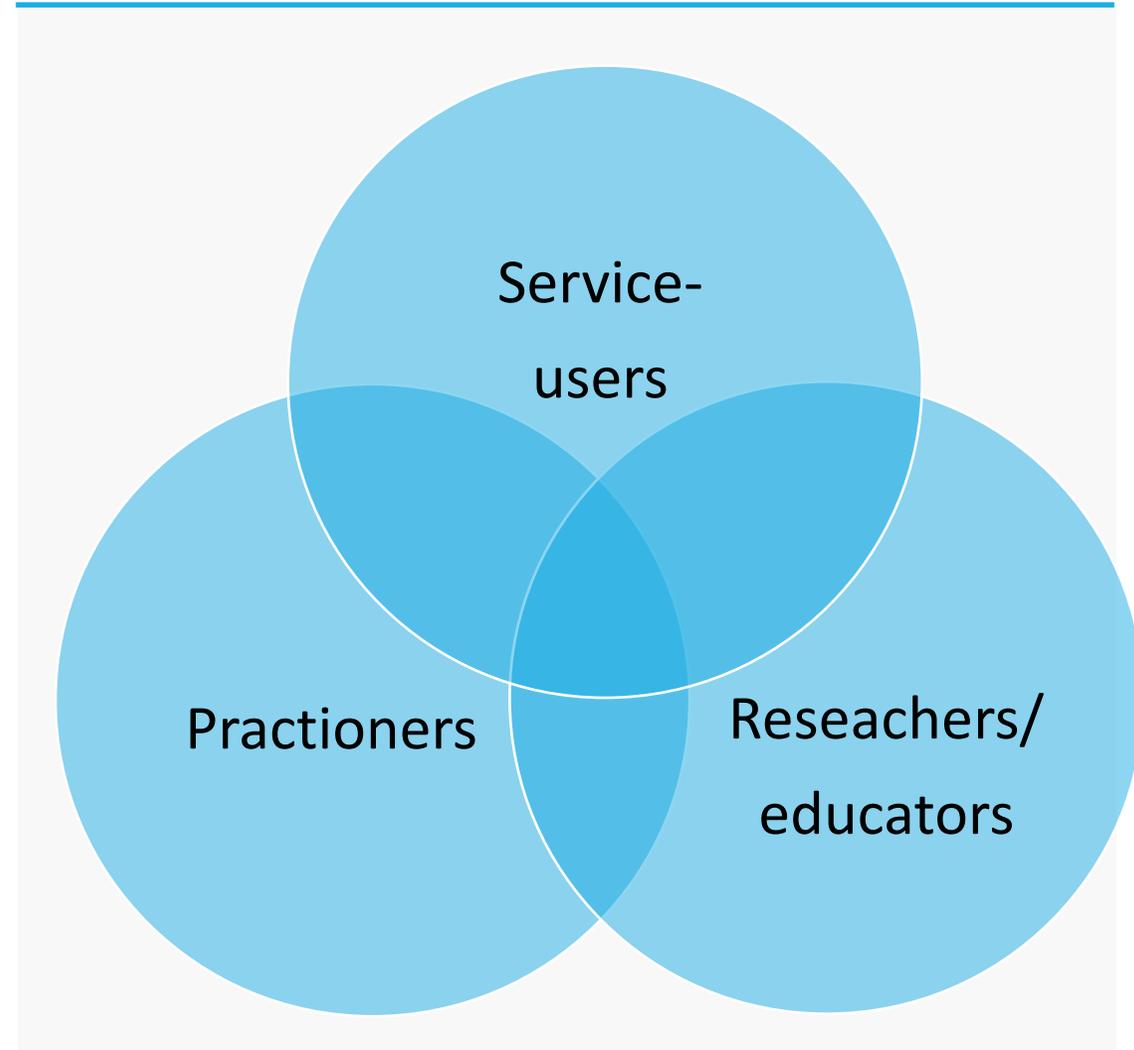
May 6, 2021



[www.chapar.no](http://www.chapar.no)

# What is a research circle methodology?

- A model for cooperation (Persson 2008, Slettebø, 2013; Slettebø & Seim, 2016)
- Structured as a group with a continuous dialogue between participants with different backgrounds
- There were ten participants in each research circle, each member representing either practitioners, services users, educators or researchers
- Purpose: the group together should explore challenges and opportunities regarding user participation for this user group, analyze challenges and implement changes in various services.
- The research circles met every sixth week over a period of 1, 5 years and were completed this spring.



# Methodological opportunities:

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- The phenomenon we study appears directly in the group's work
- The group dialogues promote the development of *meaning processes* about the phenomenon we study
- The research circle-design allow the meaning processes to develop *over time*

# Methodological challenges:

- Challenges of representation
- The research circle form makes certain demands on the participants
- The practitioners limited scope of action

# Conclusion

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- A research circle-design promotes collective knowledge production with its sensitivity to the positioned perspective of different stakeholders
- Research circle methodology is a novel method and needs further exploration to know more about its potential as a research method

## Case study 4

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Dialogue conferences:  
Methodological challenges and  
opportunities when cooperating  
with users and professionals –  
expectations of actions

**Ariana Guilherme Fernandes**  
**Monica Kjørstad**  
**ESWRA 2021,**  
**6th of May, Bucharesti**

OSLOMET

OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
STORBYUNIVERSITETET



**Challenges of  
Participation**

## Background and relevance

The introduction programme in NAV is supposed to strengthen the target group's labour market integration, and it is an important aim that the introduction programme should be developed in cooperation with each individual user.

Because participation in the programme is mandatory, user influence might be difficult to attain. Language might also be an important barrier to achieving user influence because the majority of newly arrived immigrants in the programme have only been settled in Norway for a short period.

Immigrants and refugees with little or no education background with Syrian background.



# Research question

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What are the drivers and barriers of participation and how can participation be improved?

## Research design

Explorative and inductive qualitative research over time

Dialogue meetings once a month

Communicative validation

Actions

# Status: Dialogue meetings, group interviews and in depth interviews

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Dialogue meeting with users	Group interviews with case workers	In depth interviews with management:
1. 28.02.2019	1. 18.10.2019	1. 18.12.2020
2. 11.09.2019	2. 31.11.2019	2. 18.12.2020
3. 02.10.2019	3. 10.12.2019	3. 03.02.2021
4. 07.11.2019	4. 17.01.2020	4. 18.02.2021
5. 11.12.2019	5. 21.10.2020	
6. 22.01.2020	6. 09.12.2020	
7. Action 04.03.2020	7. 06.01.2021	

# Perceived expectations of action(s):

From users	From case workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perception of not knowing their basic rights, what can they demand, are there any repercussions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Focus on user involvement in their daily work, however a wish to improve their practice and further increase user involvement? Expectations towards the researchers with respect to:</li> </ul>
<p><b>Larger structural barriers in society:</b></p>	<p>Providing theoretical knowledge on user involvement</p>
<p>Labour market: Opportunities and acces to work</p>	<p>Facilitating, organising and implementation of user council</p>
<p>Material conditions</p>	<p>Creating space for discussing and assessing user involvement approaches</p>
<p>Permanent residency</p>	<p>Debriefing ethical dilemmes in high complex cases pertaining to user involvement</p>
<p>Child protection services</p>	
<p>Discrimination</p>	

# Reflection – researcher's dilemma?

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- We strive for dialogue as it invites to a more in depth democratic communicative form in terms of developing knowledge .
- However, the dialogue form demands/pushes expectations of actions that challenges the role of researcher.
- Action research obligation to enable processes of change: On what level can we enable change? Structural, organizational and individual level
- Researcher's dilemma?

# Thank you for your attention!

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For more information, please  
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Methodological  
challenges &  
opportunities when  
cooperating with users  
with severely restricted  
autonomy

- *profound intellectual  
disability*

- *dementia*

Anita Gjermestad & Anita Strøm





# Background

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- How is user participation practiced and understood in health- and welfare services with adults with profound intellectual disability, and what promising approaches to enhance professional practises are identified?
- N: 4 case involving adults with profound intellectual disability, their families and staff.

Photo: Bøe (2017)



# Methodological possibilities

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- Research approaches sensitive towards/tuned in to and adapted to explore the non-verbal and bodily utterances and interactions together with people with profound intellectual disability
  - Ethnographic approaches
    - Observations inspired by sensory ethnography (Pink 2015)
  - Emphasising multiple voices
    - Interviewing several persons close to the persons in regard; family members and staff (Liamputtong 2007).

Photo: Bøe (2017)



# Methodological challenges

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- How to get access to the lived experiences of people not communicating
- Involving vulnerable groups in research
  - Consent from proxies
  - Risks and benefits
- Understanding and relying on observations of nonverbal interactions in everyday life
- Use of multiple voices and proxies – multiple interpretations also including the researcher's voice

Photo: Bøe (2017)



## Background

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We have explored how user participation is understood, practiced, and can be developed in nursing homes where there are residents with diagnosed dementia, but also many residents with dementia symptoms.



# Methodological challenge 1

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Redesign: from research circles to a field methodological approach.

- participating observers in the wards' everyday life, but only in common areas
- many informal conversations with different residents
- interviewed employees with different professional backgrounds individually
- interviewed relatives in focus groups

# Methodological possibility 1

User participation in dementia care is understood within a triadic perspective, consisting of the resident, relatives, and the professionals.

Field work gave the opportunity to explore the user participation's practical understandings and implementation from different perspectives.



# Methodological challenge2

- uncertainty of whether we have captured residents' voices with this research approach
- what is lost by refraining from observations in the residents' private areas?
- lot of participation takes place in the morning and evening rituals
- access to these would require other assessments from the ethics committees, perhaps exemption from consent or consent from proxies



# References

- Liamputtong P. (2007) *Researching the vulnerable : a guide to sensitive research methods*. London: SAGE.
- Pink S. (2015) *Doing sensory ethnography*, Los Angeles: Sage.

ACTION RESEARCH AND COLLECTIVE  
ACTION IN COOPERATION  
WITH PERSONS WHO ARE HOMELESS  
AND/OR SUBSTANCE USERS.  
METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES.

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ECSWR 2021 Symposium 8  
Håvard Aaslund  
VID Specialized University

# Karigate

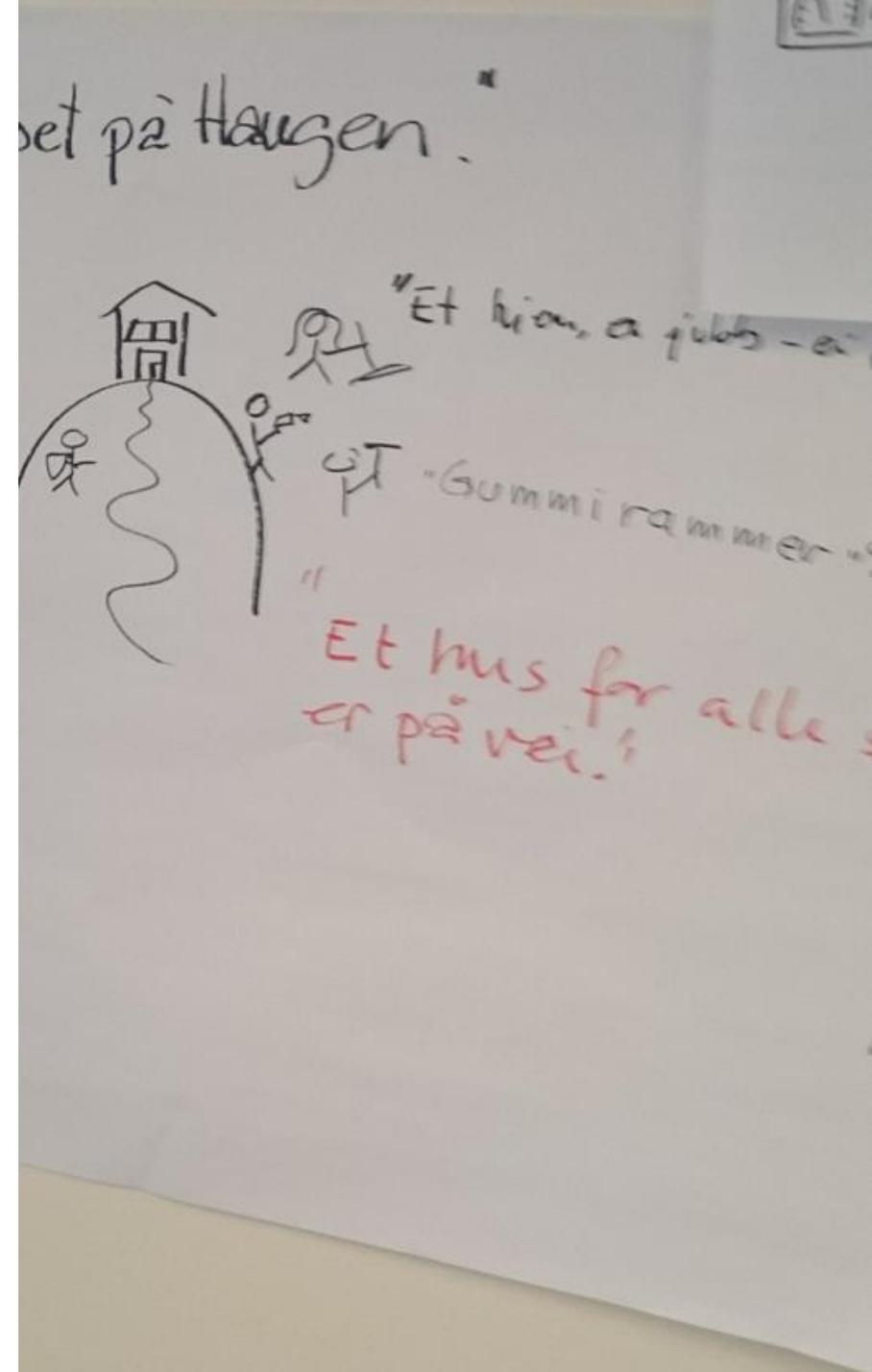
Initiated by women  
experiencing homelessness

Realized in co-operation with  
an NGO

Self-organized housing  
facility

Social entrepreneurship  
businesses

"I want to contribute to change how people experiencing drug problems are viewed. That they can do something positive. We need to end the stigma." (Participant)



# PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

	Political aim	Practical aim
Dialogue-oriented	Latin-american (Freire/Fals Borda)	Democratization of work places (Pålshaugen/Gustavsen)
Experiment-oriented	Critical-political (Mathiesen)	Critical-Utopian (Nielsen & Nielsen)



# POSITIONALITY

: From outsider towards insider  
(Herr & Anderson, 2005 s. 31)

	<i>Positionality Researcher</i>	<i>of Traditions</i>
Insider (1)	Insider (researcher studies own self/ practice)	Practitioner research, Autobiography, Narrative research, Self study
(2)	Insider in collaboration with other insiders	Feminist consciousness raising groups, Inquiry/Study groups, Teams
(3)	Insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s)	Inquiry/Study groups
(4)	Reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams)	Collaborative forms of participatory Action Research that achieve equitable power relations
(5)	Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)	Mainstream change agency : consultancies, industrial democracy, organizational learning; Radical change: community empowerment (Paulo Freire)
Outsider (6)	Outsider(s) studies insider(s)	University-based, academic research on Action Research methods or Action Research projects

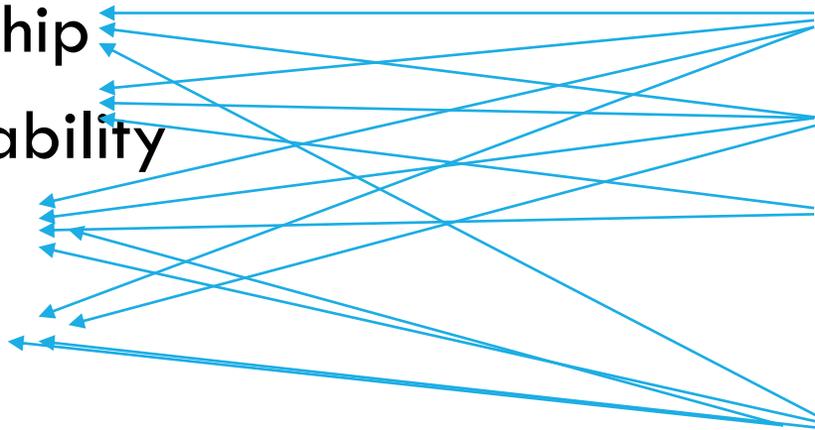
# Key issues and researcher roles in action research

## Key issues

- Ownership
- Sustainability
- Power
- Action

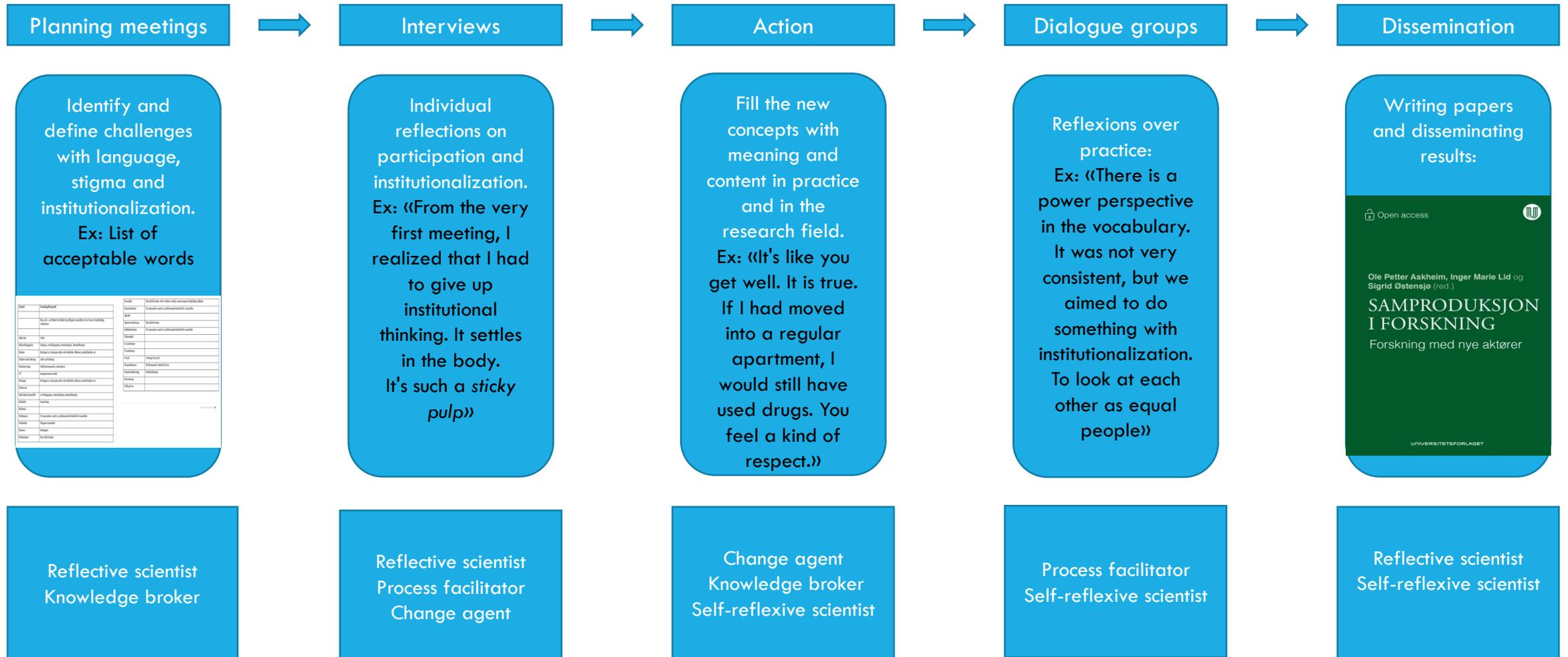
## Roles

- Reflective scientist
- Change agent
- Knowledge broker
- Self-reflexive scientist
- Process facilitator



(Wittmayer & Schöpke, 2014)

# FROM OUTSIDER TOWARDS INSIDER



# CHALLENGES FROM INNER AND OUTER POWER RELATIONS

## Inner power dynamics

Representation

Relations

A free space from power, or enhanced dialogue

Power and the researchers own position

Feedback from praxis

## Outer threats

Different understandings of knowledge

Stopping the change while studying

Change agent for activism or dialogue

Quick decisions based on limited knowledge



# Methodological challenges & opportunities with collective user participation. Results from a literature review.

Jan Marius Gathen  
Ph.D. candidate  
VID specialized University



# Background

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- Collective participation is about changing service offerings and effecting change for everyone in the same situation (Seim & Slettebø, 2007).
- Official documents state that people who use public services should influence their service reception and participate in service development (White Paper 34, 2015–2016).
- People in vulnerable situations such as the service user groups in the CHAPAR project may find it difficult to take part in collective participation due to restricted autonomy
- There is little literature about the impact of collective participation among these user groups



# Aim and Method

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- The aim of this review was to study the impact of collective service user participation in health and welfare services for people in vulnerable situations.
- The search terms included people with: dementia, substance abuse problems, mental health problems, intellectual disabilities, people involved with the child protective service , asylum seekers and refugees
- The study applied a scoping review design (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010).
- 4964 titles screened – 22 articles included

# Methodological challenges and possibilities: how to understand impact?

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- Impact is often understood in terms of effect or outcome and as a linear process.
- The term impact is also rarely used in research concerning collective participation, including the studies in this review.
- In most of the studies, the impact of participation was a minor topic and the authors did not reflect on the terms they used
- Banks et al. (2017) provide an understanding of impact as a circular process with the concept of *co-impact*:
  - participatory impact
  - collaborative impact
  - collective impact



# Results

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## Study Characteristics

- 19/22 conducted in Western countries.
- Study designs: qualitative (17), quantitative (4) and mixed methods (1).
- 13 studies about people with mental health problems
- Participation in: groups that developed or modified interventions, guidelines or information materials, surveys, service development.





# Individual Impact

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Describe how the stakeholders are affected by the participation process.

- Empowerment / disempowerment of service users
- Increased knowledge and insight about the users needs and perspective among professionals
- Enhanced user-professional relationship





# Organisational Impact

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Describe the uptake and use of knowledge produced in the participation process. Resulted in changes in:

- attitudes
- interventions
- culture
- professional practices
- organisational arrangements
- increased participation
- resistance towards participation and service users





# Policy Impact

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- Inspired by Banks et al (2017) collective impact, adjusted to the service development context.
- Participation affected focus, language and improved the user perspective in guidelines





# Conclusion

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- This review has shown that collective participation can enable service users in vulnerable situations to have an impact on health and welfare services.
- When service providers facilitate participation, they should pay attention to the possibility of harming participants.



# Sociomaterial conditions for participation in NAV

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EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPATION  
FOR CITIZENS IN A CITY, A  
METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

KJELL EINAR BARSNES, WESTERN  
NORWAY UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED  
SCIENCES



A four year  
Ph.D. project  
2019-2023

**Sociomaterial conditions for service delivery and participation in NAV** (Norwegian labour and welfare administration)

NAV was **established in 2006** as a merger of the governmental agencies for **labour services** and **social security**, and the **municipal services for economic assistance, advice, counseling and temporary housing** and more

An organization with approximately 19 000 employees of which 5 000 are employed by local authorities

# NAV's main goals are:

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- More people active and in work, fewer people on benefits
- A well-functioning job market
- To provide the right services and benefits at the right time
- To provide good services tailored to the users' needs and circumstances
- Comprehensive and efficient labour and welfare administration

# My research questions

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- How does the sociomaterial structure of NAV influence service user participation for people with alcohol and/or substance use challenges?
- How does the sociomaterial structure of NAV influence relations between service users and employees in NAV?

*Sociomateriality* convey relations as grounded in place, space, materials and material

# The field of study

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- Two labour and welfare offices in a city
- 12 service users with substance abuse and/or alcohol challenges, interviewed three times
- 6 employees interviewed two times
  
- A «Mosaic approach» involving interviews, map-making, book-creation, pictures and more; it was an inspiring methodological starting point (Clark & Moss, 2017)
  
- Takes on multiple means of communication: Phone calls, SMS, sedentary and walking interviews and focus group discussions

# *Imploreality*

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A neology to emphasize the importance of respect, recognition and flexibility in a research design

Imploring *reality* from participants, with the means of plans, materials and improvisation.

Roundtrips between theory, data and interpretations

**Inspired by Foucault, M. (2001), Lefebvre, H. (1991), Seim, S., & Sæter, O. (2018) Østerberg, D. (1998).**

# Encircling NAV's circuits

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Going from home to field

From SMS and phone calls

From documents and literature

From materials

From user and employee

From productions of space

A researcher as arbiter (?)

Or from theory to empirical data

To face-to-face meetings

To writing culture and imploreality

To materiel

To researcher

To productions of participation

Thank you

Kjell Einar Barsnes

Campus Sogndal

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Applied Sciences

But:

**How does the project contribute to change or improvements for the service users and the employees of NAV?**

**What's in it for them?**



**Western Norway  
University of  
Applied Sciences**

# Questions and discussion



Challenges of  
Participation