

APPLICATION OF ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS USED IN SOCIAL PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION PHENOMENON

ALICJA POTORSKA



Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogy, University of Kazimierz Wielki,
K. Chodkiewicza street 30, 85-064 Bydgoszcz, Poland
E-mail address: alicjapotorska98@o2.pl

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present the research process using the action research method in the project titled Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the field of youth at risk and social exclusion implemented within the Erasmus Plus programme in which the author of this article participated. The process of operationalisation of the social exclusion category and the characteristics of the methodology of action research were performed in this article. The project objectives were set out and the team appointed to carry out the research on the issue of the development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries working with adults at risk of social exclusion was described. The article subjects the research process implemented by the team of investigators to analysis and identifies the turning points in this process. Conclusions concerning the specificity and usefulness of action research in searching for social practice solutions in the field of social exclusion have also been provided on the basis of practical experience.

Key words: Care pedagogy, social exclusion, action research

INTRODUCTION

The modern world makes all kinds of economic and technological developments possible but this is always connected with the necessity of planning the actions intended to create the conditions that will be conducive to all social groups utilising their full potential, allowing them to successfully adapt to the newly-designed reality (National Plan for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020, 2014). The European Community is currently facing challenges posed by a rapidly evolving society, often referred to as a risk society. According to Ulrich Beck (2012), modern society is overwhelmed with uncertainty and helplessness towards the by-products of modernisation and the success

and achievements of humanity. The financial and economic crisis has also affected consumer culture and has led to a growing risk of social exclusion. The European Commission reports that this crisis is affecting children and families and driving the up figures of people living in poverty and subject to social exclusion in many countries (Recommendations of the European Commission, 2013). Thomas Kalinowski (2010) believes it is exactly this economic instability that is at the heart of the problem that has led to people being stripped of the chance to consume the goods that have been produced and significantly limited their chances of independently controlling their own destiny. The social exclusion risk that has affected different social groups has given rise to research needs in order to develop new forms of combating this phenomenon. The “Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the field of youth at risk and social exclusion” project, key Action 2: Strategic partnership of professional teaching and training” incorporates action research in order to search for new solutions that can effectively prevent social exclusion and provide the tools necessary to implement such measures.

This article aims to present various reflections on the implementation of action research in relation to the project objectives. It characterises the phenomenon of social exclusion, the essence of action research, and includes a discussion of the practical implementations of this action method based on one of the four research groups operating within the project, in which the author of this article was involved.

THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION PHENOMENON AS THE SUBJECT OF GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIONS

As Elżbieta Tarkowska (2006) points out, “social exclusion” was incorporated into the social sciences and political discourse over the last two or three decades. In the Polish language, the two terms “wykluczenie społeczne” and “ekskluzja społeczna” are used interchangeably. Researchers have encountered many difficulties in its operationalisation. Firstly, this is due to the fact that it is closely linked with the poverty or marginalisation category, although it is not identical to it. Secondly, it is characterised as being a complex, ambiguous and variable term over time (Tarkowska, 2006). This has also led to disparities in the very definition of the social exclusion phenomenon. Rafał Kruszka (2008) draws attention to the benefits stemming from the procedure of interchanging the term poverty with social exclusion. One such advantage is that the ruling elites were afforded the convenience of expression in debates dedicated to the impoverishment of the societies that they represent. The term social exclusion does not have the negative associations or pejorative connotations that poverty has. For this reason, it is also more acceptable in the broadly understood public opinion, and politically correct.

The academic world is divided on the assessment of the phenomenal career of the social exclusion category. Some researchers, as noticed by R. Kruszka

(2008), claim that this is simply a form of manipulation of scientific terms for political reasons. They consider the introduction of the term social exclusion to be useless because it “fails to bring any new value in relation to the term poverty. They assert that this term has no use in any analyses of contemporary social problems. According to Kazimierz Frieske (2004; quoted after: R. Kruszka, 2008) the social exclusion category leads to the abandonment of the rich-in-traditions concept of social marginalisation. It fails to contribute any qualitative change and does not facilitate the detailed and precise description of the current social situation. On the other hand, one argument that is raised concerns the value of the social exclusion concept in its definitional neutrality. The quality advantage of the social exclusion concept, according to E. Tarkowska (2006), consists in the shift of attention from the individual, behavioural and cultural causes of poverty to a system, structural, and situational perspective. It emphasises the incapacity of society leading to a large percentage of the population being left outside society. It draws attention to the social context, which is significant from the point of view of the development of groups and individuals, showing the weakness of contemporary societies - the relaxation of social integration, consumerism and lack of solidarity.

Recognising the pertinence of the arguments preferred above which highlight the fact that the term social exclusion emphasises the social context of the poverty phenomenon, the author of this article decided to use the term social exclusion and adopt the definition provided under the National Strategy on Social Inclusion in Poland. According to this strategy, social exclusion: “consists in not undertaking a customary and socially acceptable way of life or dropping out of it, this applies to individual persons, families or groups of the population that: live in a precarious economic situation (material poverty), are effected by adverse social processes resulting from mass-scale and dynamic developmental changes like deindustrialisation, crises, the sudden decline and collapse of sectors or regions, who have not been equipped with the life capital enabling them to: have a standard social position, an appropriate level of competence, successfully enter the labour market or start their own family (...), who do not have access to the relevant institutions allowing them to be equipped with life capital (...), experiencing forms of discrimination both as a result of the underdevelopment of the appropriate legislation, as well as cultural prejudices and stereotypes, who possess traits which hinder them from taking advantage of universal social resources (...), who are subject to the destructive actions of other people, like: violence, blackmail, and indoctrination” (National Strategy on Social Inclusion in Poland, 2004, p. 21).

The need to introduce system solutions combating the social exclusion phenomenon and providing support and assistance to excluded persons has not been exhausted. In the current geopolitical situation and the dynamically changing living conditions in Europe, the need for intervention will be increasingly greater. Recognition of the role of the social context in understanding the situation of socially excluded persons and the ways of approaching them may form the building blocks for the future design and undertaking of successful

actions concerning this phenomenon. The design of interactions, as suggested by Jerzy Boczoń, Witold Toczyński and Anna Zielińska (1995), should consist of developing strategic directions of action, designing social solutions, fostering social awareness and the desire of individuals to manifest attitudes of solidarity and justice. Authors have acknowledged this to be one of the vital tasks of the European Union.

The starting point for taking any action is the development of targeted programmes in European Union countries by governmental and non-governmental organisations. Anna Osińska and Pierre Klein (2011) have pointed out that the representatives of European Union structures established a task in the year 2000 the implementation of which the whole Community now faces. The main objective of this task was to conduct systemic actions combating social exclusion. It was agreed that the performance of the task will be based on the inclusion of all participants of social life, including practitioners and theoreticians working on social exclusion, in order to find effective solutions to tackle this phenomenon. Particular attention was paid to giving beneficiaries the right to speak on issues relating to them and for them to take active part in the debate on the socio-political situation.

The response to this initiative in Poland was the development of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion in Poland, which has identified the social exclusion risk areas, performed a diagnosis of the phenomenon, and described the social exclusion at-risk groups and groups that are already socially excluded. Priority issues were also formulated and the postulates for best social practices were identified (National Strategy on Social Inclusion in Poland, 2004). The next guidelines recommended by the European Commission in 2013 discussed the strategic orientations of Member State Actions. According to the European Commission, "a series of tools and indicators available within the Europe 2020" strategy should be used to provide new impetus in a concerted effort to solve the problems of poverty and social exclusion among children" (European Commission Recommendations, 2013, p. 59/10). This recommendation has resulted in the establishment in Poland of the National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 New Dimension of Active Inclusion, whose main aim is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 1.5 million, and to increase social cohesion. The tasks that appeared in the stated operational objectives concerned the prevention of social exclusion in children and adolescents (Operational Objective No. 1), the creation of conditions for providing care and assistance to elderly people accompanied by a sense of security, and their active inclusion in social life (Operational Objective No. 5) (National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020, 2014). The directions of social interventions in relation to all the set out operational objectives were detailed in the programme.

Work on the design of new solutions concerning combating social exclusion is also taking place on the tertiary level, that is, the level of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). One example of such activity is the Polish Committee of The European Anti-Poverty Network, which brings together many NGOs

operating in Poland and internationally, including: the Working Community of Social Welfare Organisations "Wrzos", the Hope Association, the Citizen's Projects Centre, and the Arc of Hope Association. All the mentioned organisations are engaged in activities aimed at helping socially excluded people. Their tasks include organising and running day centres, crisis intervention points, occupational therapy workshops, and support groups. They create the space for social transformations consisting of raising professional and social activity of socially excluded persons or those at-risk of exclusion. The presented organisations harness modern techniques and technologies in the public domain and carry out actions enhancing the activity of practitioners, organisations and institutions in the social welfare area by providing technical, organisational and substantive support (Polish Social Watch Report 2010, 2011).

The international project titled the "Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the field of youth at risk and social exclusion" was fulfilled within the Erasmus Plus Programme. The Programme was developed by the "Educ-Europe" - The European Training for Social Educators organisation, which was established by the d'Auteuil and INFA - Institut National de Formation et de l'Application (France), Haute Ecole de Bruxelles (Belgium), Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, and CRIPS - Asociatia Cebtrul de Resurse si Informare pentru Profesiuni Sociale (Romania) in 2006. Based on the information posted on the "Educ-Europe" website, this organisation was established to develop and promote innovative social intervention methods (www.educ-europe.eu). New ways of organising social actions are intended to support the idea of strengthening the beneficiary's position through reference to their potential and resources in the design and implementation process of social change. "Educ-Europe", thanks to the e-learning platform and foreign internship system, is also aimed at increasing opportunities for practitioners to develop their competencies and expand the spectrum of intervention tools.

In the project to which this article relates action research was planned in two areas of social work interests: Providing support to youth facing being in a situation of a potential conflict with the law, and working with people that have found themselves in a socially excluded position. Two goals were formulated for each of these areas:

- creating the appropriate conditions conducive to reflecting on the possible ways of social interventions,
- designing new tools and solutions to be implemented in social practice.

The achievement of these goals was possible through the group work of a team of practitioners, educators training staff for social work and former and present beneficiaries of social care. It consisted of an exchange of knowledge, personal thoughts and experiences as well as examples of good practices.

Four international action research groups were established that worked based on the action research methodology during four sessions. One research team was appointed to work on issues relating to each of the identified problem areas (namely, the development of empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in their work with youth at risk of getting into a conflict with the

law and the development of empowerment among educators and beneficiaries working with socially excluded adults). Each team was headed by two facilitators who were experts in the social work area and in action research. The first two teams worked at workshops that were held in Paris (24-29 November 2014) and in Bydgoszcz (18-22 May 2015). Two more teams were set up to work on the same areas which worked at sessions organised in Belgium (9-13 November 2015) and in Italy (1-5 February 2016). An international seminar ("How to Use the Force Within Us") was organised in Valencia (18-20 May 2016) to share a synthesis of the work performed by the research teams and to sum up the "Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the field of youth at risk and social exclusion" project. The author of the article took part in the research team focusing on the development of empowerment among educators and beneficiaries working with adults at risk of social exclusion. She was on this team when it was in session in Paris and in Bydgoszcz and also took part in the workshops and lectures of the International Seminar in Valencia.

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Action research follows from the qualitative research mainstream. According to Uwe Flick (2012), qualitative research is part of the concept of social creation of investigated realities as they are based on the perspectives held by the participants of the study on their knowledge and experience in the ambit of the research subject. The research methodologies used within this concept are characterised by an openness that ensures sensitivity to the studied processes and relations, facilitating their full understanding. It would be wrong to think that qualitative research is limited to providing knowledge on and interpretations of the studied phenomena. U. Flick suggests that "a common intention of researchers is to transform the studied area or provide practically useful knowledge facilitating the formulation of or provision of support to relevant solutions to specific practical problems". One example is action research that empowers persons and institutions to design studies on phenomena that are of interest to them or that directly concern them. They become active participants of the research process and are intent on obtaining results that they find significant. Such studies are not just concerned with obtaining a scientific result of major importance (Flick, 2012, p. 29).

Maria Czerepaniak-Walczyk writes that action research is a cognitive process aimed at recovering the ways of dealing with current problems arising from professional practice. They are conducive to interpreting and evaluating existing practical solutions and to reflecting on their transformation or change. Hence, they are "(...) a combination of the constructive and critical research strategy and the empirical and analytical research strategy" (Czerepaniak-Walczyk, 2010, p. 320).

Hana Cervinkova (2012) draws attention to the fact that action research is

purely practical and passes from reflection, through critique, to action. She clearly states that action research can be defined as a means for the emancipation of social groups and characterises two phases in the development of action research. The first (1920- 1950), began in the United States of America through Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, who was the first to use the term action research. K. Lewin's action research was to assist practitioners and constitute a tool in solving specific practical problems. The return to action research in the 1970s was spurred by the doubt in the effectiveness of teaching programmes in Great Britain. They resorted to action research in the search for viable solutions to current educational problems, switching from a positivistic methodology to an interpretative approach. From that time on, the emphasis was shifted in the action research concept from "(...) researchers - theoreticians to participants and practitioners, as the most important "users" and beneficiaries of this approach" (Cervinkova, 2012, p. 10).

Hence, it is clear why the research work within the "Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the field of youth at risk and social exclusion" project was based on action research methodology. The achievement of the project objectives that were mentioned in the text required exactly this kind of approach. The research process that was implemented in the group in which the author of this article took active part will be presented hereunder.

ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE "DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMPOWERMENT OF EDUCATORS AND BENEFICIARIES IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH AT RISK AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION" PROJECT

Action research is different from other qualitative research methods. The author of this article has sought to present the research process that was implemented in the work of the research team with reference to the examples taken from the author's own experience gained during her involvement in the project.

The methodology of action research implies that the persons posing the research questions are not just comprised of theoreticians but also practitioners and the very persons whom the practical activity concerns. They draw their research questions from an analysis of the phenomenon that they are well familiar with or which they themselves have experienced. They adopt hypotheses concerning practically observed problems and take steps to prepare and implement changes in various fields of social practice (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2010). The research team that the author was a part of was comprised of 15 persons (and two facilitators) from Belgium, France, Romania, Spain, Italy, and Poland. The team was composed of theoreticians - researchers, and practitioners (social workers, street workers, educators, and tutors) as well as persons with a personal history of social exclusion. During the first research session, the team meticulously analysed contemporary problems connected with the social

exclusion phenomenon that can be found in each of the countries represented by a given group member. Due to the complex nature and the differing problems associated with this phenomenon in the given countries resulting from the cultural, social, political and material standing context, this phase of the work was very time consuming and demanding in intellectual and emotional terms. The analysis of the study subject led to the formulation of two research questions by the team:

1. How can a social worker create the conditions that are conducive to the development of personal resources of both parties in the care and assistance relationship – the staff and the beneficiaries who are experiencing social exclusion?
2. How can a social worker strive to improve her/his own and her/his beneficiary's social, political and personal conditions? (Research Journal, 2014).

The first phase of the research process involved the introduction of research questions by way of analysis undertaken by the persons that are in direct contact with the practice relating to a given phenomenon. As suggested by H. Cervinkova (2013), the most important issue in the first phase of the action research was to acquire reliable research material. The research team working in Paris collected the research material during discussions consisting of an exchange of views, good practices and experience, and listening to the voice of the beneficiaries. Another source of research material was a study visit to the Aux captifs la libération (ESI, Area of Solidarity and Social Integration) for the homeless in Paris and a meeting with the representatives of a centre supporting incapable families. Each of these experiences was the subject of group discussion and exchange of views on the progress being made in research and also transformed the way the participants viewed the team work. The conducted discourse was often imbued with emotions that appeared as a result of entering into a real research situation. This work led to the performance of ongoing evaluations of the social actions being undertaken in relation to the discussed phenomenon, the imposition of the observed images onto one's own practice and reflecting the individual stories of the beneficiaries of the centres that were appearing. The events that the team members co-participated in during their week-long research work alternately moved the team forward or forced them to stop or go back in their tracks in the research process.

As David Silverman (2007) points out, such a research approach often gives evokes emotional reactions in the researchers, which lead to the conviction that what they see and/or hear is something absolutely certain. The author of the article sees the reason for such emotional impulses in the frequently changing dynamics and directions of research conducted by the team of which she was a member. She believes that the crucial moments in the first phase of the research work were connected with the emotional reactions of the investigators and with the group process. This observation is in line with the description of the research process propounded in literature, in which attention is paid to the fact that investigators are not just interested in the subject of investigation, pheno-

menon, or classes of phenomena but also to the context in which the study is taking place. It is stressed that the “essence of the context, equally to the study subject immersed in it and the investigating subject are susceptible to change as a result of the research interaction” (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2010, p. 322).

The objectives of the team’s research were to design new tools and solutions for social practice. The first study session resulted in the formulation of the two research questions mentioned above, the determination of the research technique and the characterisation of the study group in which each participant was meant to conduct research with the aim of collecting responses to the questions posed. The gathered material was to serve further action research and the achievement of the objective that was set during the second study session. A research journal was also started during the first study session in Paris where the course of the research process and its outcomes were recorded.

In the time between study sessions, the team members undertook actions aimed at obtaining responses to the research questions posed by the team. The author of the article was searching for answers to the research questions during her didactic work with second-year, part-time course students studying in the department of Pedagogy with a specialisation in Care Pedagogy. The selection of the group was dictated by the fact that part-time students are active professionally who actively enter the social educator, social worker, teacher/tutor and family assistant or court-appointed guardian professions. The author of the article presented the task objectives and genesis in relation to the project in which she was participating. The questions were posed to 30 students, who were asked to formulate responses and place them on a mental map. The students began work on the first question (“How can a social worker create the conditions that are conducive to the development of personal resources of both parties in the care and assistance relationship – the staff and the beneficiaries that are experiencing social exclusion?”) starting from devising a working definition of the term empowerment/resilience. They established by way of discussion that empowerment/resilience is a resource that lies within a person and is a part of her/his personality. It may also be a lifetime process facilitated by professional pedagogical, therapeutic or social assistance or a resource that is the end result of such work. Some examples of the proposals put forward by the students concerned:

- The creation of conditions conducive to the involvement of beneficiaries in social projects, the organisation of picnics, special events, and charity actions so that they could be the end product of the work put in by the beneficiaries;
- The involvement of clients in the change process of their own environment through, for instance, the revitalisation of the places in which they stay;
- The inclusion of the beneficiaries in recommended social reintegration programmes;
- The performance of a professional diagnosis of the resources held by beneficiaries and the design of workshops and group activities according to the said resources that support the further development of

relevant resources, and that create social situations conducive to all the existing resources being fully harnessed;

- The inclusion of beneficiaries in extending mutual help and assistance, namely, socially integrated persons becoming tutors in relation to those people that are experiencing problems, or organising intergenerational meetings to extend support to elderly persons who are struggling to face and take on the challenges of living in a postmodern reality;
- The involvement of beneficiaries in the creation of aid schemes, making decisions on the manner in which such schemes are to be implemented in order to create the conditions conducive to becoming an active subject in the process of social integration and management of one's own life.

The students emphasised that the way to activate empowerment among professionals is for them to continuously reflect on the actions being undertaken in the presence of other professionals, the possession of own passions and interests, taking care of one's own health, and non-work related personal development. The students also recommended the development of the skill of effective rest and relaxation, and even undertaking personal psychotherapy or the creation of support groups in order to prevent occupational burn-out (Research Journal, 2015).

The responses to the second question ("How can a social worker strive to improve her/his own and her/his beneficiary's social, political and personal conditions?") focused on ideas of taking the initiative to negotiate the terms and conditions of financing professional supervision of the activities undertaken by social workers with local authorities as well as providing them with training and workshops aimed at raising their professional qualifications. Another suggestion was to seek alternative sources of funding outside the State (investors and sponsors) and entering into cooperation with research centres with the aim of expanding knowledge and work tools and instruments (Research Journal, 2015).

During the second study session that was organised within the project and which was held in Bydgoszcz, it turned out that the materials gathered by the study group participants based on the responses to the questions posed are very large. Because of this, the group was faced with the necessity of revising the planned work schedule for the week. Once the advantages and disadvantages resulting from the amount of time required to be dedicated to becoming familiarised with the material collected by each group participant was evaluated, the study group decided to review all the materials gathered by the group members. The group dedicated almost 3 whole days to the assessment and presentation of the study material.

The study group took part in study visits on the remaining days. The first visit was scheduled in the "Polanka" Daycentre at the Shelter for Homeless Women and Mothers and Children in Bydgoszcz. The next visit was held in the Municipal Shelter for Homeless Men in Toruń. The work programmes with the beneficiaries presented by the managers of both centres inspired the study team to attempt to design an original method that can successfully be imple-

mented in practice. Despite the lengthy discussions, the team unfortunately could not come up with one specific solution.

Over the next few days of the study session, the team discussed the threats resulting from playing two roles - the role of an investigator/participant and the role a person involved in the given phenomenon that the study concerns. The essence of the conducted research was learning about the phenomenon by way of the interactions undertaken with the beneficiaries of the relevant centres. Next, the attention of the participants of the research team turned to the essence of the relationship between a social worker and a beneficiary. It was acknowledged that taking due consideration of the empowerment of the mentee, respecting her/his rights and autonomy and inciting active creation of one's own future fate comprise the most important elements of such a relationship.

It is possible to say that the lack of systematic effort put into attaining the goals and objectives that were set earlier and leading discussions that were aligned to the priorities set by the group contributed (along with the aforementioned decision to evaluate all the material collected by the group members) to there being no specific outcome of the research, in other words, no specific tools or solutions pertaining to social exclusion that could be implemented in social practice were developed. In the author's view, another significant factor that contributed to the final outcome of the research team's work was the onset of a group crisis in the final phase of the work. It is unfortunate that the group did not have the opportunity of working it out due to this phase of the project coming to an end and the group being disbanded. The presented circumstances of the research process and the decisions taken by the team in relation to the conduct of the study process led to the set research objective not being achieved. During the summary of the work of the teams, the group was unable to present any tools or solutions relevant for social practice. Nevertheless, the group did manage to achieve a genuine focus on the experiences of relevant group members, particularly former beneficiaries of social care, the development of specific work rules ensuring autonomy to all group participants and to the group itself, as well as enabling self-steering. The group also dedicated substantial time to developing the ethical principles safeguarding the good of its members who shared very personal stories with the group throughout the study process. It was important not only to safeguard anonymity in the study reports but also to react empathetically to the emotions experienced by other people. Work in a group that possesses such features was the source of many unique experiences for its members.

According to Catherine Brighton and Tonya Moon (2007), researchers harnessing action research methodology must have autonomy in the process of discovering solutions to the problem of interest to them. The appointed team under the project achieved autonomy and self-steering during the course of the study process. The facilitators leading the study group played a special role in the creation of the conditions conducive to autonomy. This is confirmed by the fact that they could successfully prevent COPIL, a team monitoring project

performance and performing its evaluation, from intervening. COPIL was dissatisfied with the group's lack of specific research outcomes in the form of a tool to change practices and attempted to exert pressure on the group. In consequence of such actions and the escalating tension between the study group and COPIL, negative sentiments and frustration started to appear among the group members. The study group facilitators stood up for the autonomy of the group, notifying COPIL that the group is making a tremendous effort to conduct the research in a reliable manner and is manifesting great insight, which is the cause of the arising delays. It fails to accept the group's departure from its adopted working style and its high level of autonomy in planning research work is its attribute and not defect.

The author of the article acknowledges that the group possessed the required research potential and any interruptions to its work, although they did result from the set schedule of works within the project, was to the detriment of the group achieving the project's objectives.

SUMMARY

The phenomenon of social exclusion is expanding rapidly and affecting all European countries. The growth dynamics of this phenomenon requires on-going systematic evaluation of the social actions being undertaken and the design of new solutions that are aligned to the actual needs of individuals and groups at risk of social exclusion. Governmental and non-governmental centres are making a concerted effort in this scope. The project titled "Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the field of youth at risk and social exclusion" presented in this article broadens the perspectives for actions undertaken in the field of social exclusion, incorporating the process of multilateral cognition and detailed analysis of the relevant phenomenon from a variety of different perspectives. The innovativeness of the project consists of implementing the action research methodology in the social action design process. According to M. Czerepaniak-Walczak (2014), the harnessing of action research as a research method facilitates gaining knowledge on the effects that are exerted on relevant investigators/practitioners of the phenomenon by the actions that they themselves undertake in practice. The team of researchers working on the development of empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in the realm of social exclusion failed to determine during their last session the main tool or solution for social practice that would constitute the end product of their research work. The following can be acknowledged as the effects of the conducted studies:

- Collection, analysis and evaluation of example social work solutions in various European countries;
- Gathering of beneficiary postulates and drawing conclusions from them concerning the relationships between social workers and clients;
- Development of the methodological pillars on the basis of which the

- next study group can work in the next year of the project's running;
- Contributing to the knowledge and development of the skills of social workers, social educators, and theoreticians, and enhancing their mobility;
- Preparation of two study journals containing a description of the research process, the comments of the participants and the conclusions from the study.

Additionally, a superior value of the conducted research was the emancipation of the beneficiaries that the studied phenomenon concerned and the evaluation of own practices undertaken by the team members, which led to the integration of the exploration process with the change process. The implementation of action research methodology resulted, according to the author, in the creation of a strong group whose work was based on trust and solidarity, autonomy and self-steering. The group was capable of undertaking further independent work aimed at implementing real changes to the social reality. However, in order for specific solutions for social practice to be developed in such a diverse environment comprised of various European Union countries, it would require, in the author's view, an extension of the time allocated for research work and the provision of support in the form of auxiliary research methods.

REFERENCES

- [1] Beck, U. (2012). Społeczeństwo światowego ryzyka: w poszukiwaniu utraconego bezpieczeństwa [World risk society: in search of the lost security]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- [2] Boczoń, J., Toczyński W., & Zielińska, A. (1995). Ubóstwo jako zjawisko społeczne oraz przedmiot pracy socjalnej [Poverty as a social phenomenon and the subject of social work]. In: T. Pilch, & I. Lepalczyk (Ed.), *Pedagogika Społeczna [Social pedagogy]* (pp. 341-366). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Żak".
- [3] Brighton, C. M., & Moon, T. R., (2007). Action Research Step by Step: A tool educators to change their worlds, *Journal Articles Gifted Child Today*, 30 (2), 23-27.
- [4] Cervinkova, H. (2012). Badania w działaniu i zaangażowana antropologia edukacyjna [Action research and engaged education anthropology], *Teraźniejszość - Człowiek - Edukacja*, 1 (57), 7-18.
- [5] Cervinkova, H. (2013). Etnografia edukacyjna i badania w działaniu - z warsztatu kształcenia nauczycieli [Educational ethnography and action research in teacher education: a case study]. *Forum Oświatowe*, 1 (48), 123-137.
- [6] Czerepaniak-Walczak, M. (2014). Badanie w działaniu w kształceniu i doskonaleniu nauczycieli [Action Research in Teacher Education and Professional Development], *Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych*, 19 (2), 181-194.
- [7] Czerepaniak-Walczak, M. (2010). Badanie w działaniu [Action research]. In: S. Palka (Ed.), *Podstawy metodologii badań w pedagogice [Fundamentals of research methodology in pedagogy]*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo GWP.
- [8] Flick, U. (2012). Projektowanie badania jakościowego [Designing qualitative research]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- [9] Frieske K. (2004). Utopie inkluzji. Sukcesy i porażki reintegracji społecznej [Utopia of inclusion. Success and failures of social reintegration]. Warszawa: IPiSS.
- [10] Kalinowski, S. (2010). Przeciwdziałanie wykluczeniu społecznemu jako zadanie edukacyjne władz lokalnych [Tackling counteracting against social exclusion as an educational task of

- local authorities], *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Handlu i Usług w Poznaniu*, 18, 157-170.
- [11] Kruszka, R. (2008). Wykluczenie społeczne – rys interpretacyjny i użyteczność badawcza [Social exclusion - interpretation and research usefulness], *Kultura i Edukacja*, 1(65), 35-69.
- [12] *Monitor Polski*. Official Journal of the Republic of Poland (2014) Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 New Dimension of Active Inclusion. Warsaw (pp. 42-55). Retrieved June 30, 2016, from www.mpips.gov.pl/bip/akty-prawne/programy/krajowy-program-przeciwdzialania-ubostwu-i-wykluczeniu-spolesznemu-2020-nowy-wymiar-aktywnej-integracji/
- [13] Mussato C., Pollefait R. (2014). *Dziennik badawczy zespołu naukowo-badawczego: Rozwój upodmiotowienia wychowawców i beneficjentów w pracy z osobami dorosłymi wykluczonymi społecznie* [Research journal of the research team: Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in working with socially excluded adults]. Part One (12-28 May 2014).
- [14] Mussato C., Senior B., Pollefait R. (2015). *Dziennik badawczy zespołu naukowo-badawczego: Rozwój upodmiotowienia wychowawców i beneficjentów w pracy z osobami dorosłymi wykluczonymi społecznie* [Research journal of the research team: Development of the empowerment of educators and beneficiaries in working with socially excluded adults]. Part Two (19-22 May 2015).
- [15] National Strategy on Social Inclusion in Poland (2004). Warsaw (pp. 21-24). Retrieved June 29, 2016, from <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/aktualnosci-wszystkie/art,5537,4540,narodowa-strategia-integracji-spolesznej.html>
- [16] Official Journal of the European Union (2013) Commission Recommendation on ,Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of marginalisation. Retrieved June 29, 2016, from http://eurlex.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2013/231/oj/pol/pdfa1aw
- [17] Osińska, A., & Klein P. (2011). Aby to, o czym mówimy, zmieniło nasze życie [To what we are talking about has changed our lives]. In: R. Szarfenberg (Ed.), *Ubóstwo i wykluczenie społeczne w Polsce* [Poverty and social exclusion in Poland] (pp. 11-24). National Report of the Polish Coalition Social Watch and Polish Committee European Anti-Poverty Network. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Kampania Przeciw Homofobii.
- [18] Silverman, D. (2007). Interpretacja danych jakościowych [The interpretation of qualitative data]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- [19] Tarkowska, E. (2006). Ubóstwo i wykluczenie społeczne. Koncepcje i polskie problemy [Poverty and social exclusion. Concepts and Polish problems]. In: J. Wasilewski (Ed.), *Współczesne społeczeństwo polskie. Dynamika zmian* [Contemporary Polish society. Change dynamics] (pp. 319-365). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Scholar".