

Participation in Social Research: “Quijotism” or Construction of a World View?

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Participation has become a buzzword and lost much of its impact. Nevertheless, there are enough arguments to revisit the concept and its use in social research. One of them is that it is part of a tradition of action and participatory research which acquired specific features in different parts of the world. In Latin America it was, and still is, very much integrated with the idea of social transformation and democratisation of society. The question posed is how to avoid the pitfalls of either a romantic view of participation or a demagogical one. The article deals with some of the reasons to revisit participation, as well as some understandings, conditions and strategies for participation.

Key words: participation, social research, participatory utopia, dialogue

Introduction

The diversified and frequent use of the word participation has produced distrust regarding its significance and relevance. This cannot be attributed only to some malignant forces intended to manipulate people for consumption or gain them for their ideologies in a somewhat perverse way. This may also happen, but it is not the whole story. First, if participation is on the agenda from left to right, from kindergarten to research centres, from community organisations to international policies, there must be something worthwhile in the idea which should not be overlooked. The reasons range