

Social work, poverty and parity of participation: A search for social justice

Katrien Boone

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Rudi Roose

Co-supervisor: Prof. dr. Griet Roets

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Work

Academic year 2017–2018

Social work, poverty and parity of participation: A search for social justice

Katrien Boone

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Rudi Roose

Co-supervisor: Prof. dr. Griet Roets

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Work

Academic year 2017–2018

Dutch title

Sociaal werk, armoede en gelijkwaardige participatie: een zoektocht naar sociale rechtvaardigheid

Doctoral Advisory Committee

Prof. dr. Rudi Roose (supervisor)

Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Prof. dr. Griet Roets (co-supervisor)

Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Prof. dr. Geert Van Hove

Ghent University, Department of Special Needs Education

dr. Didier Reynaert

University College Ghent, Department of Social Work

Examination committee

Prof. dr. Geert De Soete (chair)

Ghent University, Dean of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences

Prof. dr. Michal Krumer-Nevo

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Spitzer Department of Social Work

Prof. dr. Anna Gupta

Royal Holloway University of London, Department of Social Work

Prof. dr. Geert Van Hove

Ghent University, Department of Special Needs Education

dr. Joris De Corte

Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Acknowledgements

Throughout my childhood, my parents engaged in conversations with friends, family, and me and my brother about the injustices in the world, deriving from their day-to-day experiences in the union work of my father and the educational work of my mother. On the one hand, their anger and indignation about what was happening in the world came through in those conversations, as they drummed into me and my brother's heads that problems of poverty and deprivation had a structural cause. On the other hand, their kindness and fairness were also a big part of our education, showing us how to be warm and just in our daily actions while emphasising that the socio-economic or ethnic background of people did not determine the core of who people are, nor should it determine whom we chose to be our friends.

This background is important just to say that reflecting on injustice and poverty was already part of my upbringing when I was young, and such reflection has continued to be influential in the decisions I have made in my own life, though in some varying forms. In my teenage years, this manifested itself in, for instance, marching on the streets while declaiming activist slogans or by tearing apart the campaign posters of an extreme right party. After my secondary school, I chose to study social work, not specifically because I wanted to 'help people' but rather with the aspiration to 'change something in society'. In my early 20s, I can recall having endless discussions in pubs with people trying to get them to see my point of view (convinced that I had the only right point of view). In my mid-20s, my commitment to justice translated into a somewhat more modest stance as I expended my energy through my first job as a community builder. Finally – and this dissertation is the result of this choice – I have dedicated myself to research focusing on the role of social work in the fight against poverty.

Writing a PhD will be exciting, it will test you to your limits and might be your cup of tea in numerous ways... But... doesn't it also require the skill of systematic organising?

With those words of my former boss, I left my previous job in community building to explore a new challenge and it has indeed resulted in some exciting years, to say the least. I developed as a person, as a researcher and as a writer, while my driving skills also improved drastically as I drove through the whole of Flanders for my observations and interviews. And yes, I must admit that I might even have become a better organiser, although the subfolders on my computer are still up to some improvement and the process of putting my thoughts on paper is still a

chaotic venture... Just to say that the last five and a half years were exciting, complex and frustrating at times; and stimulated, challenged and confronted me as a scholar and as a person. All those experiences were channelled into this final piece. Completing this enterprise is of course not only down to my own merit, and I have a lot to thank others for (and not only for organising stuff for me):

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to the research subjects of this dissertation.

This starts with thanking all of the involved Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice. I am indebted to all the participants, practitioners, volunteers and third parties who were willing to give their perspectives in interviews and focus groups. A special thanks also goes to the five organisations that let me be the curious/irritating observer of their work. I was extremely surprised by the openness of the practitioners, volunteers and participants, since they all warmly welcomed a researcher who had to keep a critical perspective on their daily activities. They let me be part of their family throughout the research process and talked to me without reservation while showing and explaining to me what they did, why they did it and how they struggle.

The expertise of the steering group for my research in turn enabled discussions of how some research findings could be strengthened if connected to the daily reality of those practices, and of how the analysis of a handful of organisations could relate to the diversity of the field. We often had very animated discussions in this steering group and sometimes disagreed with one another, but I am grateful that such interactions took place in a context where jokes could be made and each other's expertise acknowledged.

Off course the Network against Poverty must also feature in this list, with specific thanks to Katrien Spruyt and Swa Schyvens, who constantly gave their reflections on the research and were very open to reflecting on the complexity of working in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice in order to think about how the Network could best support the organisations amidst this complexity. In that light, I also want to give special recognition to Stef Jorissen, a former employee of the Network against Poverty and the initiator of the research, since he addressed our department with the question of doing some in-depth research on the work of the organisations and was always open to thinking about the research project and reflecting on preliminary findings, even when he was no longer working for the Network against Poverty.

Secondly, I want to thank Griet and Rudi for being the supervisors of this dissertation and my most important advisors in recent years. While getting the constant input of two mentors can be considered a tremendous advantage and a blessing, it also proved to be a challenge since they often had different opinions as well as different ways of communicating them. As a result, I often found myself to be more confused after our meetings than before. Nevertheless, since all of our substantial discussions were undertaken in a very open manner in which all parties could have their say and in which Rudi and Griet acknowledged my own expertise in practice as essential, I believe that this strengthened me as a person and enriched my own thinking process. More specifically, I want to express my appreciation for Rudi's mentorship. He has had – I guess without realising it – a very comforting influence as we are somewhat alike in our ways of thinking and processing information, and he always showed me that he believed in my capabilities and research project, even when I got stuck or was overwhelmed. Also, he challenged me by not giving me answers but by asking me essential questions, enabling me to move forward in the research. Griet inspired me probably most of all because of her strong commitment to practice and her enthusiasm for doing field research. She also challenged me to move beyond my intuitive and general way of reflecting, advised me to provide such reflection and analysis with body and depth, and helped me in the process of analysing data. As such, she was important in enabling me to make sure that others could follow my thoughts, analysis and findings. And last but not least, I appreciate that the both of them showed a lot of understanding that a research process spread over a number of years implies that this cannot – and should not – be completely separated from personal changes and challenges over those years. They provided me the flexibility in the research process to be attentive to such personal circumstances while always expressing to me their belief that I would succeed in doing good research and in finalising this dissertation.

I am also indebted to the members of my guidance committee, Prof. dr. Geert Van Hove and dr. Didier Reynaert, and to a former member of this committee, Prof. dr. Danielle Dierckx, for their care throughout my process and for their thoughtful consideration and often challenging questions, which provided me with a lot of food for thought. While this feedback might have confused me at the meetings, I do believe that it assisted me in bringing more logic and direction to my dissertation.

Next, our department was also important for me throughout this research, as there is a very supportive atmosphere amongst colleagues and room for combining hard work with the necessary pleasure. I was thankful that Whitney

and Hanne could be my third and fourth eye in the finishing stage of writing this dissertation and for the lay-outing skills of Patrick. Also I was very happy with the colleagues that I shared an office with through the years, because we always collaboratively created an environment where people helped one another and were supportive of everyone's specific struggles.

Some persons I would like to mention by name, as they were vital for me throughout this process.

First of all, I want to thank Jochen. While – and he is well aware of this as we often joke about it – I was not his biggest fan when he started to work at the department as I wrongly believed he was quite 'posh', he became one of my closest friends there. Despite the fact that he often gave me stress because he is so damn good at his job and writes articles like it is no effort, I appreciate how he was always there to help me in every way he could and how we were always able to laugh about both of our small characteristics throughout our stressful process. Ine, Lieselot and Caroline gave me a lot of comfort in the last phase of writing my PhD, as they shared their own experiences of running through the last year of their PhD and their words made me believe that I was able to make it to a successful end, even when I didn't see the wood for the trees. And I also want to thank Shana, since she provided me daily – sometimes every hour - with the words "you can do it!". While I must admit that in the beginning I suspected her of just saying a sentence which was considered by the general public as supportive, she really showed her belief in me throughout the process, which especially motivated me in the last months.

Last but not least, my personal network was very important.

Everybody who knows me a little bit, is aware that my friends are a big part of who I am. Since they are not familiar with the subject or material of this dissertation, it took about four years for them to remember the title of my PhD, frequently asking: "it was something with redistribution and poverty, no?" You can imagine that they were not so happy to discover that I changed my title six months prior to finishing this dissertation, forcing them to start all over again. But all jokes aside, my friends have been a constant value throughout this research process, in which they often took away a lot of pressure in our weekly 'apero-fridays' or in moments where I was in panic mode by firmly stating that they believed in me but that my own world would still be meaningful irrespective of whether I finalised the dissertation. While I sometimes had internal resistance towards such claims and got sucked into my own PhD world, it nevertheless

meant a great deal to me to be aware that I was surrounded by people who cared about how I was feeling, not about what I accomplished.

My girlfriend Jolien was of great value to me in this whole process. Since she does not come from a background where getting a higher degree is a must, I admire her for pushing through her own wall and stubbornly succeeding in her attempts to get her degree as an occupational therapist and for combining two jobs while also supporting me in recent years. I can imagine it is very difficult for a partner to understand what it requires to write a PhD when you are not part of that world, but she had so much patience with me when I had to work in the weekend or when I was, for instance, not exactly in a joyful mood because I got stuck with my writing. And even when I let my head hang for a moment because an editor rejected my article, she had an inexhaustible belief in me, claiming that “the editor was stupid for not seeing the value of what I had to bring to the table”. Her unconditional support and love was what got me through in the most difficult moments.

Finally, I want to end by thanking and celebrating my family. While the last years have not been the easiest for our family, I have a tremendous amount of love and respect for my brother, my godchild, my sister-in-law, and off course for my parents. I have so much to thank my parents for and – without pretending to invent new words – I want to end by repeating the words I wrote down in my master thesis in 2008:

Throughout the years, my parents showed me that ambition doesn't imply that you throw away your principles. Years in which they taught me to think from an open, non-judgmental frame, in which possessions don't say a lot about the person in front of you. Years in which they showed me that you have to approach reality critically, but at the same time need to acknowledge the beautiful things in life. My parents are characterized by a strong sense of justice, and I hope I can follow in their footsteps.

Katrien

June, 2018

Table of contents

CHAPTER 1	19
General introduction	19
1.1 The role of social work in the fight against poverty	21
1.2 Social work in changing welfare state regimes	23
1.2.1 Pre-welfare-state regimes	23
1.2.2 The rise of the welfare state	24
1.2.3 Social welfare states	25
1.2.4 Active welfare states and the social investment perspective	26
1.3 Poverty, social work and participation	28
1.3.1 Poverty as a 'structural participation problem'	29
1.3.2 Participatory social work practices in Belgium	31
1.3.3 Participatory social work practices: transformative or integrative purposes?	33
1.4 In search of a pedagogy of combatting poverty	35
1.4.1 Problem statement	35
1.4.2 Research aims	38
1.4.3 Research studies and research questions	39
1.4.4 General overview of the research process	41
1.5 Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice	42
1.5.1 The six criteria of the Poverty Decree	43
1.5.2 Main characteristics of APRVs	45
1.5.2.1 The diversity in genesis	45
1.5.2.2 Activities and vision	46
1.5.2.3 Working with practitioners as well as with volunteers	48
1.5.2.4 Training and education	48
1.5.2.5 Collaborating with external partners	49
1.6 Research choices and ethical considerations	49
1.6.1 Participatory research stance	50
1.6.2 Ethical dimensions	51
1.7 In-depth overview of the research process: three studies	52
1.7.1 Study 1: Developing a conceptual framework	53
1.7.2 Study 2: Mapping Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice	54
1.7.2.1 Document analysis of APRVs vision statements and operating reports	54
1.7.2.2 Interviewing APRV practitioners	56
1.7.2.3 Conducting focus groups	57
1.7.2.4 Analysing the interviews and focus groups	58
1.7.3 Study 3: In-depth research on how practitioners deal with the complexity of their work	58

1.7.3.1 Prologue: Involving more perspectives of people in poverty before digging deeper	59
1.7.3.2 Selecting five different APRVs	59
1.7.3.3 Participatory observations in the five organisations	62
1.7.3.4 In-depth interviews on the basis of the participatory observations	63
1.7.3.5 Focus groups to broaden and discuss the results	64
1.7.3.6 Analysis of all the data in study 2	65
1.8 Overview of the chapters	65
1.9 References	68
CHAPTER 2	83
Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums	83
2.1 Introduction	87
2.2 Changing welfare state regimes and social work	89
2.3 Revealing the social justice aspirations of social work	90
2.3.1 Three dimensions of social injustice	90
2.3.2 Affirmative and transformative ways of dealing with injustice	92
2.3.3 Affirmative social work strategies in dealing with poverty as a social problem	93
2.3.4 Transformative social work strategies in dealing with social problems: the solution?	94
2.3.5 Embracing complexity in social work	96
2.4 Fraser meets social work: creating cultural forums	97
2.4.1 Creating cultural forums through Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice	98
2.4.2 Parity of participation in the creation of cultural forums	100
2.5 Concluding reflections	101
2.6 References	102
CHAPTER 3	109
Social work, participation and poverty: Exploring the ‘how’, the ‘who’, and the ‘what’ of supporting the participatory parity of people in poverty	109
3.1 Introduction	113
3.2 Participating on a par: an exploration of the work of Nancy Fraser	114
3.3 Fraser meets social work	116
3.4 Research objectives	117
3.5 Research methodology	117
3.6 Tensions, bottlenecks and complexities in shaping a politics of representation: the ‘how’, the ‘who’, and the ‘what’ of social justice	121

3.6.1 Shaping the 'how' of social justice	121
3.6.2 Shaping the 'who' of social justice	123
3.6.3 Shaping the 'what' of social justice	126
3.7 Concluding reflections	127
3.8 References	129
CHAPTER 4	135
Enabling the recognition of people in poverty through social work practice: From being on a par to participating on a par	135
4.1 Introduction	139
4.2 Social work practices as enabling niches for the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty	140
4.3 The (de-)coupling of recognition from a structural analysis	141
4.4 Methodology	143
4.5 Findings	144
4.5.1 Providing low threshold places	145
4.5.2 Stimulating a sense of equal worth	146
4.6 Connecting enabling niches to the aim of societal change	148
4.6.1 Creating transformative enabling niches	148
4.6.2 Critical considerations in making this connection	151
4.7 Concluding discussion	153
4.8 References	154
CHAPTER 5	161
Raising critical consciousness in the struggle against poverty: Breaking a culture of silence	161
5.1 Introduction	165
5.2 The legacy of Paulo Freire in social work	167
5.2.1 Creating a culture of silence: a banking concept of social work ...	168
5.2.2 Towards cultural action for freedom: a problem-posing concept of social work	169
5.3 Raising critical consciousness through social work practices: a complex and ambiguous venture	170
5.4 Methodology	171
5.4.1 Research context	171
5.4.2 Strategies of data collection and analysis	172
5.5 Research findings	173
5.5.1 Reframing poverty as a collective issue	173
5.5.2 Connecting experiences to structural components and injustice ..	176
5.5.3 Using power while stimulating critical consciousness	178
5.6 Concluding reflections	181
5.7 References	183

CHAPTER 6	189
Learning to play chess: How to make sense of a politics of representation with people in poverty when aiming for social change	189
6.1 Introduction.....	193
6.2 Representing the perspectives of people in poverty through social work: confronting and merging knowledge.....	195
6.3 Research objectives	197
6.4 Methodology	198
6.4.1 Research context	198
6.4.2 Strategies of data collection and data analysis.....	199
6.5 Findings.....	200
6.5.1 The complexity of merging knowledge in the fight for social change.....	200
6.5.2 Representing voice or collective knowledge?	201
6.5.2.1 Representing knowledge on a par?	203
6.5.3 The vital role of practitioners in dealing with these complexities ..	205
6.5.3.1 The practitioner as a guardian of collective and transformative elements	206
6.5.3.2 The practitioner as a strategical chess-player	207
6.6 Concluding reflections	209
6.7 References	211
CHAPTER 7	219
Conclusion.....	219
7.1 Research concerning a pedagogy of combatting poverty: areas of choice	221
7.1.1 Poverty as a structural participation problem.....	221
7.1.2 A combination of critical theories and perspectives	223
7.1.3 Participatory research in all its complexity	225
7.1.4 Stimulate debate on the problem of poverty	229
7.1.5 To choose or not to choose?	230
7.2 Towards a pedagogy of combatting poverty through our research.....	232
7.3 Building blocks for a pedagogy of combatting poverty in social work	234
7.3.1 Taking a social justice perspective to heart in social work	235
7.3.2 From the individual-structural towards the affirmative-transformative	237
7.3.3 Imparity of participation as a way forward.....	241
7.3.3.1 The complexities of working towards transformation	241
7.3.3.2 The danger of trying to become a heroic agent	244
7.3.3.3 Becoming reflexive chess players: being involved in the art of the impossible	246

Table of contents	17
-------------------	----

7.4 Potential future endeavours	251
---------------------------------------	-----

7.5 References	256
----------------------	-----

English summary	265
------------------------------	------------

Nederlandstalige samenvatting.....	281
---	------------

Data storage fact sheets	297
---------------------------------------	------------

Overview of the five selected APRVs for the third study.....	303
---	------------

Overview of the observations in the third study	310
--	------------

CHAPTER 1

General introduction

1.1 The role of social work in the fight against poverty

The most elementary intention of the welfare state has been the elimination of poverty. (...) Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century, after a hundred years of effort, the question of poverty is still the most central issue of the social dimension of Europe. (Fritzell & Ritakallio, 2010, S25)

As articulated in this quote, the fight against poverty remains an urgent issue in the European context (Cantillon, 2011; Copeland & Daly, 2012; Lister, 2004; Mestrum, 2011; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015). Many European welfare states are currently facing existing as well as new social and economic crises and risks (Taylor-Gooby, 2011; Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 1999; Williams, 1999), resulting in an increasing number of people who are living in poverty or who are at risk of ending up in situations of poverty (Cantillon, 2011; Eurostat, n.d., 2013). In relation to their particular historical, social, political and cultural contexts, the majority of European welfare states currently acknowledges poverty to be a structural, material and multi-dimensional reality influencing the lives of millions of citizens (Lister, 2004; Mestrum, 2011). In the framework of the Lisbon strategy (2000-2010) and the EU 2020 strategy (2010-2020), the European Union therefore expresses a political concern to achieve tangible results in anti-poverty policy while formulating the ambitious target to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion (Copeland & Daly, 2012).

In an attempt to achieve such ambitious targets, social work has been assigned a pivotal role as an important player in the fight against poverty (Jones, 2002; Lorenz, 2016, 2017; Payne, 2005). This comes as no surprise, since social work as a profession finds its origin in an engagement in working with people in poverty (Lorenz, 2006, 2016; Payne, 2005). The International Federation of Social Workers also stresses the important role of social workers in the eradication of poverty:

In practice all over the world, social workers concern about poverty has increased because of their long history in working with the marginalized, or excluded, those lacking resources, scenarios which push them to poverty situations? (International Federation of Social Work, 2012)

Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration that although European welfare states often acknowledge the structural causes in the conceptualisation of what poverty is, the measures adopted to engage in the fight against poverty are nevertheless often translated into strategies that mainly focus on activating and integrating people into society rather than on changing structural societal mechanisms (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Lorenz, 2014; Piketty, 2014). These societal and welfare state developments evidentially also percolate the engagement of social work with issues of poverty and social justice, in which many social work practices tend towards such activating and integrating strategies (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Garrett, 2002; Lorenz, 2014; Maesele, 2012; O' Brien, 2011; Payne, 2005; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015).

In an attempt to re-emphasise the critical role of social work, a number of social work scholars have therefore committed to reflecting on social works' engagement with social justice, social change and the fight against poverty (e.g. Ferguson, 2008; Garrett, 2010; Gray & Webb, 2009; Krumer-Nevo, 2016, 2017; Lorenz, 2016, 2017; Millar, 2008; Mullaly, 2007; Stepney, 2005; Webb, 2010, 2014). This dissertation also aims to make a contribution to this reflection by linking a social justice framework to a detailed empirical study and thereby to dig deeper in how social work practitioners¹ can relate to the problem of poverty in all its complexity while fulfilling the ambition to pursue social justice and promote social change.

Before we unravel this potential role in chapters 2 to 6, we first expand on the historical dimensions of the relationship between poverty and social work in the international context. Second, we shed light on the complex relationship between poverty, social work and participation, and discuss how the notion of participation has become dominant in the context of Belgium and Flanders. Third, we expand on our research topic and research context, namely Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs]. In the last part of this chapter, a detailed overview is given of the three studies that were conducted in this research.

¹ We use the term social work practitioners here to give recognition to the diversity of practitioners in the field of social work. While in the UK context 'social workers' are often considered as a specific type of professional, but in the Belgian context for instance it refers to people who are working in a social work context (going from casework to community building, to social art projects...). This implies that they can have an education in social work but also in other fields as long as they are active in a social work organization. As such, throughout the dissertation social work practitioners as well as social workers is used, both referring to somebody who is active or has a mandate to take on the general responsibility in a social work practice.

1.2 Social work in changing welfare state regimes

Rather than conceiving the concept of poverty as fixed and neutral, we see poverty as a 'normative construct', varying according to the ways in which it is defined by different actors in different societies (Lister, 2004; Mestrum, 2011). This implies that how the problem of poverty is defined is essential for understanding anti-poverty policy-making, and also implies that our understanding of poverty and the resulting policies are influenced by prevailing welfare state regimes (Dean, 2010; Featherstone *et al.*, 2012; Lorenz, 2017; Roets & Roose, 2014; Veit-Wilson, 2000). Hence, the changing social, economic and political policies and concerns prevailing at different times in history are in line with the changing conceptualisation of poverty and the role of social work in fighting it (Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015).

In what follows, we will attempt to map the historical roots and notions of the changing welfare state in European societies in differing socio-political contexts, as a way of gaining a better insight into contemporary welfare rationalities, the prevalence of poverty and how this influences the commitment of social work towards tackling poverty in the present (Lorenz, 2008). While building upon the gradual development of the conception of the role of the welfare state in the provision of welfare and the fight against poverty, we can broadly distinguish four periods in which shifting ideas are at play: the pre- welfare-state regimes, the rise of the welfare state, the social welfare state and the active welfare state.

1.2.1 Pre-welfare-state regimes

Pre-welfare and modern constitutional welfare states, with their roots in Western enlightenment ideals, were based on the rule of law and liberal democracy throughout the 19th century (Dean, 2013; Villadsen, 2007). At the end of that century it became clear that traditional bonds could no longer be regarded as natural and given, since radical social, political and economic transformations had taken place. Owing to this development, which Donzelot (1984) referred to as 'the social question', European societies were under pressure to reinvent a new basis for society (Rosanvallon, 2000). During these processes of industrialisation, pauperisation and urbanisation in different European states, citizens were expected to rely on their labour power to maintain their welfare and were left without any social security in assumed social, political and economic individual freedom (Villadsen, 2007). As such, the state distinguished between the so-called 'deserving' and 'non-deserving' poor, between those who deserved help since their morality and behaviour was worthy and those who did not

(Lorenz, 2016; Winance, 2007). Paupers were conceived as a potential productive force, focusing on their inherent potential to contribute to society (Villadsen, 2007).

In different European states, interventions were first characterised by a widespread use of repressive and coercive measures in the form of, for example, workhouses and practices of forced labour, and later on by morality-based instructions offered by intermediate charitable and philanthropic organisations (Maesele, 2012; Villadsen, 2007). The origins of social work are therefore rooted within the domain of civil society and concentrated in upper- and middle-class concerns about poor people (Lorenz, 2006). Steeped in bourgeois philanthropy and charity (Payne, 2005), these private social work initiatives soon started to represent the answer to social problems. Social problems, such as poverty and criminality, were regarded as problems of a deficient morality amongst the poor. This group became perceived as an unintegrated and dangerous class in society (Jones, 2002; Simpson, 2007). Social work mainly involved implementing disciplinary civilisation and education strategies in order to teach poor people to (re)integrate socially into the existing social order (Lorenz, 2006; Michielse & Vankrieken, 1990; Villadsen, 2007). Since the support provided to the poor was temporal, conditional and selective, social work was perceived as a form of charity (Maesele, 2012). In the long run, the poor were responsible for their own welfare and the dominant ideology “naturalised the broader stratification of power, resources and rights” (Carey, 2003, p. 412). Here, enlightenment ideals and the superior moral status of the philanthropists were leading principles; nevertheless, these strategies did not resolve the situation of the poor (Jacobs, 1984). After all, their problem was “how to render the poor useful to the state, not to secure their welfare” (Villadsen, 2007, p. 312).

1.2.2 The rise of the welfare state

From the beginning of the 20th century onwards, European states gradually started to conceive a role for the state in securing the welfare of citizens (Payne, 2005). To secure the social order, governments were involved with the problem of poverty and this focused public attention on the social integration of the poor. Increasingly, not only did social policy invest in anti-poverty strategies for the deserving poor, but European welfare states started to develop general initiatives to protect people from social risks (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). In the first decades of the 20th century, public concern emerged about the well-being of deprived groups. This resulted in early laws and structural provisions were sparsely conceived (Carey, 2003; Driessens & Geldof, 2009), particularly

concerning the welfare of children such as child protection laws (Roose, 2006) and early childhood provisions (Vandenbroeck, 2006), including an early impetus towards social welfare provisions (Maesele, 2012). During the rise of the welfare state, however, Western imperial powers became preoccupied with competitive national efficiency (Simpson, 2007). At that time, social work operated in the shadow of criminal justice, as a burgeoning yet confederate social actor deployed to realise social order in European nation states and aimed at the prevention of deviance (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). Social control was viewed as necessary and disciplinary and educational strategies were developed to govern those who were employable and could contribute in key ways to the capital of the nation state, as well as “to control the unproductive and socially different” (Carey, 2003, p. 421). Social workers, who were often women representing ‘the common good’ under cover of bourgeois philanthropy, exercised a subtle sort of paternalistic social control (Jones, 2002). These mechanisms of social control and surveillance included the family, education, work programmes, social institutions and informal relational practices in the community (Carey, 2003). Social work was involved in the enactment of this system of control, yet was also engaged with the tenets of the labour movement (De Swaan, 1988). After the First World War, the economic crisis of the 1930s destabilised many European states, leading to mass unemployment (Driessens & Geldof, 2009), yet the dominant discourse about poverty kept on highlighting the individual inadequacy of the poor (Harris, 2008). During the Second World War, the desire of European nation states for a pure human race and a ‘perfect’ and productive society led to stringent repressive policies based on the argument for economic savings to regenerate the nation (Roets, Dean & Bouverne-De Bie, in press).

1.2.3 Social welfare states

After the horrors of the Second World War, many European welfare states – particularly in continental Europe – were transitioned into social welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Subsequent attempts to fine-tune welfare rights after the Second World War extended the principle of democratic participation in welfare states to those who had been politically excluded subjects without power or property (Offe, 1984). Welfare rights were therefore increasingly recognised and institutionalised in the following decades (Dean, 2010), with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 demonstrating the will to recognise the social equality of citizens. Here, the right to human dignity for every citizen was acknowledged as the basis for conceiving social welfare states (Rimlinger, 1983; Turner, 2008).

In economically advanced states, it was thus widely accepted that the welfare state should play an essential role in the provision of the welfare of people (Lorenz, 2007, Payne, 2005). Here, welfare states increasingly focused on a 'politics of redistribution' (Fraser, 1995, 2005a, 2008) in which the realisation of the equality of citizens, including people in poverty, was considered vital and resources and power were redistributed (Lister, 2004). Next to labour market qualification and securing the social order, creating equal opportunities to live a life in human dignity became a new social political goal (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Lister, 2004). As such, the social work profession was drawn into a fundamental reordering of solidarity structures as an intricate part of the various post-war welfare state projects and had to confront new challenges (Lorenz, 2014). Rooted in administrative case-work methods, techniques of personal counselling and disciplinary power (Donzelot, 1979), the social work profession was not well adapted to such a rights-based approach. From a reorientation towards the principle that everybody has the right to live a life in human dignity, the main pillars of the welfare state were constituted through the provision of those services which every citizen might expect to need within a 'normal' life course, such as healthcare, education, social security and housing. Here, social work acquired a relatively autonomous position from the 1970s, playing an essential role in shaping the relationship between the 'private sphere', in which private troubles and concerns are at stake, and the 'public sphere', in which public issues and concerns are at stake (Lorenz, 2008). From a commitment to every person living a life in human dignity, social work became increasingly invested in a diversity of sectors, such as education and healthcare, and in providing a variety of services and opportunities for all people to flourish, such as socio-cultural work and community building.

However, while the idea existed in the first post-war decades that poverty as a social problem would be resolved through redistributive measures and economic growth (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Roets *et al.*, 2012b; Vranken, 2010), it became increasingly apparent that poverty had not disappeared. Such developments and insights contributed to the revision of the existing social welfare paradigms (Rosanvallon, 2000; Van Lancker, 2013), which will be discussed in the next section.

1.2.4 Active welfare states and the social investment perspective

Whereas the post-war period was characterised as prosperous, it can be argued that the European welfare states have been under pressure during recent

decades (Lorenz, 2007), since a growing group of citizens appear to be at risk of ending up in situations of poverty and welfare dependency (Dean, Munro & Parker, 1999; Fraser & Gordon, 1994, Gray, 2013; Taylor-Gooby, 2011). As such a new social question emerged, dealing with the question of how to combine solidarity with social insurance (Rosanvallon, 2000). In this light, the combination of the growing welfare dependency with the emerging of neo-liberal ideas brought a changed way of thinking about the welfare state to the foreground. Here, the welfare state is redefined not as a source of protection from risk, but as itself a major generator of risk (Beck, 1992; Gray, 2013; Williams, 1999). As such, the main focus of the welfare state has shifted from income protection and the redistribution of resources and power to a reorientation of the welfare state towards a policy focused on activating people to achieve job security.

In such evolutions, a 'social investment perspective' has become prominent (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015), its main argument being that people should not be considered as passive objects of a welfare policy and should be empowered to cut loose from welfare dependence and be actively guided into work, with investment in human capital development (for instance, through early childhood education and lifelong learning) and in enhancing people's capacity to participate (Cantillon, 2011; Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013).

While the evolution of the rationales of welfare states exemplify how new types of answers are formulated on how to combine individual freedom with the search for communal equality (Lorenz, 2014), many scholars nevertheless have voiced reservations (e.g. Cantillon, 2011; Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013; Clarke, 2005; Dean, 2007; Lorenz, 2014). They argue that this often leads to the pressing danger (and reality) that contemporary societies slide "into a cult of individualism, fostered by the politics of neoliberalism, that reduces the question of how to achieve social solidarity to a matter of individual effort" (Lorenz, 2014, p.1). Here, it is argued that a social investment perspective should go hand in hand with traditional forms of social protection and redistribution, as it falls short in protecting vulnerable groups in society (such as disabled people and people in poverty). Therefore "investment cannot be the only rationale for welfare state intervention; protecting people should remain equally high on the policy agenda" (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013, p. 561).

As social work is deeply connected to and influenced by the welfare state project, this evolution has influenced the profession (Lorenz, 2016). This is, for instance, clear in how social work positions itself towards rights and obligations. Where the rationalities of the post-war social welfare state influenced a shift in social

work from a charity-based towards a rights-based approach, nowadays it can be observed that charitable strategies are re-emerging in social work (Maesele, 2012; Villadsen, 2007). Welfare rights and citizenship are no longer considered to be an entitlement but become conditional on individuals, since rights can be translated by social work as social obligations (Dwyer, 2004, 2016), alongside which the individual responsibility of citizens to maintain their welfare is stressed (Kwekkeboom, 2010; Rose, 1989). In direct relation to the problem of poverty, this consequently leads to the pressing danger of putting the right for everyone to live a life in human dignity under pressure (Maesele, 2012), while distinguishing again the deserving from the undeserving poor (Handler, 2003).

The reorientation of the welfare state towards a focus on human capital has also gone hand in hand with discussions about how to organise the relationship between citizens and government. Here, the evolution from traditional representative democracy towards more participatory forms of democracy has come to the foreground (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). While from an optimistic perspective such participatory discourse gives rise to a greater belief in the power and responsibility of citizens and to a new administrative culture in which citizens can co-shape policy (De Rynck & Dezeure, 2009), the contemporary emphasis on participation is nevertheless also viewed with much scepticism, as it is, for instance, sometimes believed to derive from the tendency of government to withdraw from issues of welfare provision, in which responsibility for personal as well as societal well-being is conceptualised as an individual or community task (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). In what follows, we will therefore discuss the relationship between poverty, social work and participation in greater depth, while linking some broad developments to poverty in the Belgian and Flemish context.

1.3 Poverty, social work and participation

As we have indicated, the conceptualisation of poverty is a construction as it is dependent on the political, social and economic conditions and concerns in prevailing welfare states and is also constructed differently by a variety of groups within societies. On this matter, Lister (2004) very rightly argues that poverty is “a political concept”, as it is highly contested and “the policies developed to tackle poverty reflect dominant conceptualizations” (p.3). Consequently, this illuminates how poverty and anti-poverty strategies closely relate to questions of power and participation, as it deals with questions of who has the power to define poverty

and formulate anti-poverty strategies. In what follows, we therefore discuss how we deal with the issue of participation.

1.3.1 Poverty as a 'structural participation problem'

In relation to the topic of participation, Bouverne-De Bie's (2003) definition of poverty is inspiring for my dissertation, as she defines poverty as "an interplay of a lack of sufficient resources, being excluded from society and multiple deprivation" (p.4, own translation). While a lack of sufficient resources first of all connects poverty to a lack of income, it also refers to a lack of opportunities to acquire social and cultural capital and to effectuate political and social rights. Moreover, societal exclusion on different levels of society - micro, meso and macro - is at the core of the poverty problem. And last but not least, she also states that poverty is about multiple deprivation since it concerns an accumulation of a lack of resources and societal exclusion processes that all interact with one another.

Such reflections on poverty are inspirational for our work, because next to the given that poverty has got to do with material deprivation, the focus on societal exclusion also reveals that people in poverty are marginalised, in the sense that their power to actively define and shape their own situation is taken away, possibly leading to acquiescence in this situation (cf. Freire, 1970 – see also chapter 5). In other words, people in poverty have little power to participate in the definition of what poverty is and in considering what measures should be set up to combat it (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Lister, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012). Poverty can therefore be regarded as a 'structural participation problem', since people in poverty are granted a marginal and passive position in society and they experience a lack of resources, due recognition and institutional power to influence their subordinated position (Doom, 2003; see also Fraser, 1995, 2005; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2009, 2016; Lister, 2004, 2013).

With regard to this issue, it is essential to stress that the emphasis on the direct participation of people in poverty in research, policy and social work has gained tremendous weight since the 1990s (Beresford, 2002; Beresford & Croft, 1995, 2004; Cruikshank, 1999; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2008, 2016; Lister, 2002, 2004; Mehta, 2008). Many international scholars have described how in the last decades of the 20th century, a growing focus on relational, symbolic and social aspects of poverty arose (Fraser, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008; Garrett, 2010; Gupta, Blumhardt, & ATD Fourth World, 2017; Houston, 2016; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Lister, 2002, 2004, 2013; Thompson, 2006, 2009; Webb, 2010, 2014), leading

to social policies paying greater attention to recognition of the inherent worth and need for participation of people in poverty. Such developments derived partly from the political macro level of the welfare state with its own rationalities, as, for instance, we described above regarding how the social investment perspective gave rise to participatory initiatives. However, these rationalities were also complemented and supported by social movements, which grabbed opportunities to stipulate publicly the importance of giving recognition and voice to people in poverty (Roets *et al.*, 2012b) and as such, get beyond their “second-class citizenship” (Lister, 2004, p. 165). Here, the main argument was that while people in poverty had the same political status and equality as citizens, their welfare rights were on many occasions not realised in practice, as they experienced that they were denied the right to participate in social interactions (Lister, 2004, 2013; Roets *et al.*, 2012b, Roets & Roose, 2014). As a consequence, participatory principles and practices gained increasing importance in research, social policy and social work practice (Beresford & Croft, 2004; Cornwall & Brock, 2004; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2016; Lister, 2004; Mehta, 2008).

On the one hand, this focus on participatory opportunities potentially indicates that attempts are being made to move beyond power-related issues and the marginalisation of people in poverty, as a diversity of participatory approaches in policy and practice have germinated. This is, for instance, clear in the attention given to the use of testimonials from people in poverty to inspire social work practices and social policy makers, to the employment of people with poverty experience in governmental services, to the focus on the participation of people in poverty in the planning of activities and to the formal participation of people in poverty in internal board meetings and local consultation groups.

Nevertheless, it is also argued that the complexity of such projects should not be taken lightly and it is necessary to keep the mechanisms and purpose of such participatory practices under continuous review (Beresford, 2010; Cook, 2002; Cools, Leggio, Matras, & Oosterlynck, 2017; Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Davies, Gray, & Webb, 2014; De Corte *et al.*, 2018; Postle & Beresford, 2007; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Roets & Roose, 2014; Thompson, 2009). In light of this complexity, Belgium – and more specifically Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) – makes a compelling research context since the participation of people in poverty has been regarded as essential in social policy making since the late 1980s/early 1990s.

1.3.2 Participatory social work practices in Belgium

As indicated above, the prosperous post-second world war period in Belgium was based on the idea that poverty could and would be overcome by economic wealth and growth, but the oil crisis brought an end to the economic prosperity (Dierckx, 2007) and poverty was rediscovered as a major social problem towards the end of the 1970s (Vranken, 1998). This was paired with a renewed focus on the problem of poverty: there was growing attention to 'new poverty' – people who become poor due to a sudden economic recession – and poverty was reconceptualised as a complex and multi-dimensional problem (Dierckx, 2007) in which the symbolic and relational components of living in poverty gained importance (Roets *et al.*, 2012b). As such, poverty came gradually not only to be considered or mainly as a problem of income, but also to be strongly linked with a lack of other resources, such as housing and education, and with questions of exclusion and participation of people in poverty (Vranken, 1998, 2001).

While the decade of the 1980s was characterised by such a broadened conceptualisation of poverty, it did not, however, lead directly to a broad spectrum of specific and focused measures to combat poverty on a diversity of living domains and people in poverty were still not considered direct actors in the Belgian poverty policy (Dierckx, 2007). Gradually this changed in the second half of the 1980s and through the 1990s, during which the Flemish and local policy levels gained importance and a greater openness to involving actors other than policy makers started to emerge, with a specific interest in people themselves living in poverty. To fully understand the context of the 1990s in Belgium and the anti-poverty strategies developed in that decade, it is important to be aware that in the parliamentary elections of 1991, the extreme right wing party then known as 'Vlaams Blok' won its first big election success (which is to this day still known as 'Black Sunday'). The rapid rise of the party came somewhat to the surprise of all – especially the dominant political parties – and post-election analysis concluded that its success was a signal of resistance from citizens to a distant democracy in which politicians supposedly represented the voice of the people, and a plea for a more direct and participatory democracy. In this context it is also important that interpretations of this election success made it clear that many of the votes came from disaffected people living in deprived neighbourhoods in the cities (Dierckx, 2007).

Consequently, a more participatory discourse arose, in which the direct involvement of people in poverty began to gain influence in policy thinking. This was also in line with the pleas of user involvement groups and grass-roots groups

and movements, who stipulated the importance of recognising the voice of people in poverty (cf. *supra*. See also Roets *et al.*, 2012). In the case of Belgium, the 'General Report on Poverty' (1994) is regarded as a milestone in the acknowledgment of the participation of people in poverty in policy-making (Vranken, De Boyser, & Dierckx, 2003). This report followed the government's declaration of 1992, in which the idea of a society based on solidarity was emphasised. In this light, the government requested ATD Fourth World and the Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) to produce a report on poverty. During the preparation of the report, the King Baudoin Foundation was also involved in coordinating the effort. This report was believed to be a tool in the fight against structural causes of poverty and deprivation by mobilising people in poverty and social actors. In the preparation and finalisation of the report, the collaboration of politicians with academics, but also with people in poverty and with organisations that unite people in poverty, was seen as essential.² The report was finalised in 1994 and consisted of chapters with a direct reference to the economic, social and cultural rights integrated into the Belgian constitution in the same year.³ These rights were connected to a range of testimonials and life knowledge, and the report contained numerous policy recommendations following this connection.

One of the suggestions in the General Report on Poverty was the creation of a permanent structure for dialogue between people in poverty, their organisations, government institutions and a range of stakeholders in the social and welfare sector. After a long process, the Federal 'Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service' was created in 1998 to achieve this goal and to follow up the policy recommendations suggested in the General Report. At the Flemish policy level, some organisations that were involved in the creation of the General Report collaborated in a group process to discuss the mutual characteristics of their organisations. This process was coordinated by the Flemish government, in which the main idea was to come to an arrangement for them to be structurally acknowledged and for subsidy criteria to be agreed (Van Robaeys & Dierckx, 2004).

This process finally resulted in the Flemish Poverty Decree of 2003, in which the participation of people in poverty in developing policy concerning the problem of

² Organisations working with people in poverty included: Belgisch Netwerk Armoedebestrijding, Beweging van Mensen met Laag Inkomen en Kinderen, De Cirkel, Centrum Kauwenberg, Luttes Solidarités Travail, Beweging ATD Vierde Wereld, Project Kansarme Vrouwen van de Stedelijke Emancipatieraad Leuven.

³ Art. 23 & 24 See

https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/constitution/GrondwetUK.pdf

poverty was the central starting point. One component of the Decree foresaw the acknowledgement and subsidising of educational programmes for ‘experts by experience’⁴ and stipulated that the Flemish Government should envisage initiatives for their employment. Another major part – and deriving from the aforementioned group process leading to the Decree – consisted of the acknowledgement and subsidising of ‘Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice’ [APRVs], which constitute the research domain of this dissertation.

1.3.3 Participatory social work practices: transformative or integrative purposes?

From a critical point of view, we have emphasised that poverty can be regarded as a problem of unequal power relationships marked and influenced by an interplay of social, economic and political components (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Doom, 2003; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Lister, 2004, 2013). In a commitment of social work to social justice (Craig, 2002), participation should therefore be conceived as a societal exercise in overcoming the social exclusion and second-class citizenship of people in poverty (Lister, 2002) and aimed at transformation towards a more participatory and just society (Fraser, 2005, 2008).

Nevertheless, it should not be ignored that the attention devoted to involving people in poverty and to participatory developments in social policy and practice has also been the subject of much scrutiny and critical consideration in the European as well as in the Belgian context. While it is widely acknowledged that the engagement of social work in the recognition and participation of people in poverty is vital, this engagement should be considered against the background of the increasing construction of poverty as a psychological problem (Fraser, 1995, 2000, 2005; Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Houston, 2016; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Lister, 2002, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012b; Webb, 2010, 2014), in which the troubled identity of people in poverty becomes the focal point of analysis and intervention. Consequently, this approach has resulted in a growing commitment of social work practice to a narrow understanding of empowerment and participatory practices, in which the emphasis is on the individual’s perceptions and self-realisation while trying to strengthen their identity and self-worth (Villadsen, 2007; Webb, 2010):

⁴ Experts by experience are people who are considered to be experts on poverty since they have own experiences on poverty and are able to frame their individual experiences in a bigger picture. In Flanders a specific education program exists in which people can get a degree of being an expert.

Social work for empowerment is about realizing the individual's willpower, authority and capacity to act. Social workers construct clients as powerless, with no self-authority, and promise to turn them into powerful persons who can exercise self-mastery (Cruikshank, 1999). In this sense, empowerment is a form of power that claims to ensure a quantitative maximization of the clients' power over themselves. But how are empowered clients to be fabricated out of powerless ones? As it turns out, social work for empowerment often subscribes to quite specific conceptions of the immanent qualities and potentials which are to be empowered in the client. (Villadsen, 2007, p. 317)

This implies that in the context of the evolution in the welfare state towards activation and human capital investment, limited or narrow understandings of poverty, recognition, empowerment and participation only contribute further to a focus on personal identity and responsibility in order for people to connect with society (Baistow, 2000; Fraser, 2000; Roets *et al.*, 2012). The emphasis on psychological interpretations of social problems in social work practice, then, can have counterproductive effects, since they might isolate the problem of poverty from structural conditions and power structures within society (Baistow, 2000; Fraser, 1995, 2000, 2005; Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer Nevo, 2017; Lister, 2002, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Webb, 2010, 2014).

Relating such critical considerations to the case of Belgium, social work practices in general and Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice as a specific practice are to this day often inspired by the poverty definition of Vranken, which states:

Poverty is a network of instances of social exclusion that stretches across several areas of individual and collective existence. It separates the poor from society's generally accepted patterns of life. They are unable to bridge this gap on their own. (Vranken, 1992, p. 19)

While this definition is exemplary for a broader perspective on poverty from the 1970s onwards, in which the economic components were connected with other material and immaterial resources (*supra*), it also influenced the move of social work practices in the following decades towards a narrower approach to how social work might deal with poverty (Roets *et al.*, 2012). By building on components of this conceptualisation of poverty that emphasise 'the gap' that people in poverty cannot overcome on their own, it has opened the door for social practices mainly focused on feelings of powerlessness, isolation, shame and

apathy (Roets *et al.*, 2012b; Van Regenmortel, 2002). Consequently, it is argued that the empowerment and participation of people in poverty are often framed as a way to overcome the gap towards the “generally accepted standard of living” (Roets *et al.*, 2012b, p. 811). This implies the danger that in participatory practices, the participation of people in poverty is decoupled from the fight for structural change, leading to an instrumental or conformist understanding of participation in which it is nothing more than a means or instrument to stimulate the integration of people in poverty into the dominant order in society (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Cornwall & Brock, 2004; Davies, Webb, & Gray, 2014; Gupta *et al.*, 2017).

In this dissertation, we therefore aim to deepen the theoretical as well as the empirical insights into how social work and social practitioners can develop what we define as strategies for acting on this complexity. We will outline our problem statement more concretely in the following section.

1.4 In search of a pedagogy of combatting poverty

1.4.1 Problem statement

The complexity as described above reveals the historical tension and complexity in which social work has been caught since its early days, namely whether social work should be engaged in integrating the individual into society or committed to transforming society (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; De Corte & Roose, 2018; Driessens & Geldof, 2009; Lorenz, 2016). As social work has a mandate for addressing private difficulties in relation to public issues (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Lorenz, 2008; Richter & Andresen, 2012), social work should be regarded not as a neutral bystander in relation to social policy rationalities, but as engaged in the “act of social policy making” (Lorenz, 2016, p. 13-14), in which it can position itself in the debate on where the focus of change should be directed.

With regard to this topic, as long ago as 1920 Simon Nelson Patten had already criticised social workers for being involved in individual casework, calling this “a vain struggle against impossibilities”. He blamed the helping professions for rejecting his argument “that the final solution poverty lay in ‘institutional measures’ – legal and structural changes – to extend the standards of middle class life to all Americans” (in Fox, 1968, p. xliii). More recently, Dowling (1999) has pointed out that in an idealistic view we could state that:

The poor do not need social work because the problems of poverty are complex, economic and long-term. Poverty is concerned with fiscal policy, unemployment, multinationals and the worldwide transfer of goods and services which social workers have no power to affect. (p. 249)

Hence, as the critique of these authors shows, the role of social work in combatting poverty is not evident. In contemporary times, too, the attempt to engage with this complex task reveals that it is sometimes questioned whether social work has a role to play in the first place and if so, what this role should include. Jordan (2008), for instance, explains that due to changes in the economic and political organisation of national welfare states in the last decades of the 20th century, social work might be perceived as a way of “dealing with the casualties of economic restructuring” (p. 441), since it cannot directly solve the problem of poverty. This exemplifies the danger that contemporary social work might try to escape from the inherent complexity by being less preoccupied with how to fight structural causes of poverty. As such, social work’s main consideration is then how it – as part of the system – can be invested in the care of people in poverty while trying to compensate for the problems they encounter and support them in their integration into society (Jordan, 2008; Van Ewijk, 2010).

Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that despite the given that it is part of the system, social work has been defined – and re-emphasised this definition some years ago – as being concerned with the empowerment of service users as well as with societal change and issues of social justice, while putting the participation of people in poverty at the heart of the profession (IFSW, 2014). Social work has therefore also often been critiqued for taking on such one-sided caring and compensating strategies, for being ‘a dog that did not bark’ (Jordan & Jordan, 2000) that lost its political orientation while it adjusted itself to the changes in and retrenchment of the welfare state on issues of social care and justice (Mullaly, 2007). In doing so, social work itself contributed to the individualisation of the problem of poverty by developing practices that mainly focus on integrating people into the dominant society (Davis & Wainwright, 2003; Hermans, 2012; Roose *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, we have illustrated above that today the participation of people in poverty in and through social work practice might merely become a way of empowering people in poverty to learn to overcome their own powerlessness in order to integrate into society rather than develop transformative goals towards a more participatory and just society (Baistow, 2000; Garrett, 2010; Roets *et al.*, 2012b). As such, social work runs

the danger of locking itself one-sidedly into a technical and normative role focused on integrating people in poverty into society and becoming a constitutive practice for existing society, in which “emphasis is put on questions of how to solve predefined social problems, without questioning the underlying problem definition” (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014, p. 49)

Opposed to such a technical and affirmative approach, many authors have promoted a more critical stance of the profession in an attempt to bring the fight for social justice and social transformation again into the foreground (e.g. Carey & Foster, 2011; Ferguson, 2008; Fook, 2002; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lorenz, 2016). Where the participation of people in poverty in these proposed critical answers does not serve such an instrumental goal, it is nevertheless pointed out that they might run the danger of passing by too quickly to the complexity of social problems social work has to deal with (Millar, 2008; Wilson & Beresford, 2000). Taking the transformative potential of social work to heart, this implies that such answers potentially oversimplify a complex relationship between structural oppression and the experiences and needs of people themselves in finding a place in society (Millar, 2008), in which these strategies might abandon or give little attention to interpersonal relationships (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). As such, it is not clear how the quest for a critical and political stance in social work relates to the specific needs, concerns and aspirations for growth of individuals within contemporary society (Hermans, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Millar, 2008).

This dissertation therefore engages with the issue of how “to deepen the pedagogical perspective on social work” (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014, p. 49) in order to “promote a renewed critical examination of the profession’s political role and highlight the need to turn interventions at the personal level into occasions that affirm social citizenship, ensure rights and promote social equality” (Lorenz, 2016, p.4). Such a ‘pedagogical perspective’ implies first and foremost that social work practices should be considered or conceived not as neutral enterprises, but as intentional interference in the process of the socialisation of people into society (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). As such, far more than finding neutral and method-based answers or solutions for how social work practitioners can “do things right” in practice or how to solve complexities in practice, a constant reflexivity on “doing the right things” should be present (Vandenbroeck, 2010, p. 149-150). In such reflection it is vital to be conscious of the inherent complexity of the work in those practices while trying to connect individual experiences, concerns and needs to the broader socio-political level. This implies that social work should not only see its legitimacy in the needs of people in poverty or in the needs of society, but “first of all in the quest to support the democratic discussion

on the transformation of private problems into public issues” (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, p.50). Taking a pedagogical perspective in social work therefore requires that the primary question for social work in the fight against poverty is not about one-sided determination of how people in poverty can be integrated into society, but is first and foremost about how social work can contribute to the creation of democratic practices in which exchange, interaction and dialogue can offer opportunities to learn about and understand a diversity of meanings in the same situation, and consequently create opportunities to reflect collaboratively on how these meanings relate to social justice (Biesta, 2014, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Freire, 1970, 1972; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). As such, it involves the engagement of social workers, as well as the people they work with, in public debate “as joint action to understand democracy as an engagement to human dignity and social justice” (Bouverne-De Bie, 2014, p. 52).

In an attempt to thus deepen the pedagogical perspective on social work, we will tackle the question in this dissertation of how social work practitioners of Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice can act upon the inherent complexity of recognising the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to engage in the fight for social justice; or in other words how a ‘pedagogy of combatting poverty’ might be shaped while taking the participation of people in poverty to heart.

1.4.2 Research aims

This dissertation has the general ambition to broaden the theoretical and empirical knowledge of how social work practitioners can develop a pedagogy of combatting poverty, focusing on dealing with the complex interplay of taking the direct concerns and aspirations of people in poverty into consideration while striving for societal change and social justice.

One of the more specific research aims is to develop a conceptual framework for social work in which this complexity is embraced rather than attempted to be overcome (Roose *et al.*, 2012) and as such contribute to the reflection of what the role of social work practices in the fight against poverty can be.

Supported by such a framework and by empirical research data, another aspiration is to stimulate academic as well as public debate on how oversimplified black and white answers are not the solution in the fight against

poverty. In the same vein, we aim to stimulate critical discussion of the meaning of the participation of people in poverty themselves in the fight against poverty.

Last but not least, this research aims to provide an in-depth insight into the strategies of social work practitioners in dealing with this complexity, and as such aims to be inspirational for international scholars, but also for social work practices, social work practitioners and social policy makers that want to engage in the fight against poverty together with people in poverty themselves.

1.4.3 Research studies and research questions

In an attempt to unravel how such a pedagogy of combatting poverty can be shaped, we have built upon the combination of theoretical insights and an empirical case study in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs]. Here it is important to state that the first seeds for this research were planted by the Network against Poverty (the umbrella organisation of APRVs). As there was already an exchange between some employees of the Network against Poverty and some researchers of the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy in the light of a training session organised by the department, this particular research initially started with a question from the Network against Poverty. They primarily wanted to gain a deeper insight into what Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice do and what the meaning of that work is for people in poverty.

While taking this initial question to heart, a 'retroductive approach' (Emerson, 2004) guided our research process, which indicates that we constantly moved back and forth between theoretical concepts or ideas and data from our research into APRVs, with both interplaying with one another (Downward & Mearman, 2007; Emerson, 2004; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). This approach gives recognition to the knowledge the researcher gains throughout the research process, in which theoretical concepts and ideas inspired the conduct of empirical research, while the data gathered also inspired us to revise our theoretical concepts, explore new ideas and concepts and focus on some specific components. As such, in this dissertation a number of research questions are tackled, which build further on and are interconnected with one another.

Before turning to the empirical studies that provide concrete insights and data with regard to such a pedagogy of combatting poverty, a conceptual study is presented as a first study, which was guided by the question:

- *How can the role of social work in dealing with the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate societal change be conceptualised? (chapter 2)*

In the conceptualisation of this role, the importance of the principle of parity of participation was stipulated. Consequently, we wanted to gain deeper insight into the experiences of practitioners in the complexities of shaping such participatory enterprises. As such, the second study in this dissertation addresses the following question:

- *Which tensions, bottlenecks and complexities in relation to social justice do practitioners experience in their commitment to participatory principles and practices? (chapter 3)*

While moving back and forth between our developed conceptual framework and our empirical fieldwork on how practitioners from APRVs can act upon these complexities, three main elements of importance arose with regard to their role: 1) creating safe and supportive environments; 2) stimulating people in poverty to engage in the fight against poverty; 3) and supporting people in their ventures while stepping into the public debate. This was translated into three additional research questions, which were tackled throughout the third study:

- *How can social workers develop environments that enable the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty while linking such contexts to structural and transformative objectives? (chapter 4)*
- *How can social workers actively engage people in poverty who have been subject to processes of alienation and internalisation in the struggle for societal change and what are the complexities in these strategies? (chapter 5)*
- *What are the complexities related to the direct participation of people in poverty in representation processes and how do these relate to the role of social practitioners in trying to bring about societal change? (chapter 6)*

1.4.4 General overview of the research process

	METHODOLOGY	ADDRESSED RESEARCH QUESTIONS	
STUDY 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	Conceptual clarification through a context review of the literature	How can the role of social work in dealing with the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate societal change be conceptualised?	Chapter 2

CHOICE FOR A CASE STUDY OF ASSOCIATIONS WHERE PEOPLE IN POVERTY RAISE THEIR VOICE

	METHODOLOGY	ADDRESSED RESEARCH QUESTIONS	
STUDY 2: MAPPING APRVs	Exploring vision statements and operating reports Interviews with practitioners Focus groups	What tensions, bottlenecks and complexities in relation to social justice do practitioners experience in their commitment to participatory principles and practices?	CHAPTER 3

Need for in-depth study to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies of practitioners in dealing with the complexities of shaping participatory practices that aim for societal change.



	METHODOLOGY	ADDRESSED RESEARCH QUESTIONS	
STUDY 3: IN-DEPTH STUDY OF 5 APRVs	An exploratory group discussion with people in poverty	How can social work practitioners create strength-based environments that enable the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty while linking such contexts to structural and transformative objectives?	CHAPTER 4
	Participatory observations		
	One-on-one interviews with practitioners	How can social workers actively engage people in poverty who have been subject to processes of alienation and internalisation in the struggle for societal change and what are the complexities in these strategies?	CHAPTER 5
	Group interviews with participants, volunteers and policy makers		
	Focus groups with people in poverty and practitioners	What are the complexities related to the direct participation of people in poverty in representation processes and how do these relate to the role of social practitioners in trying to bring about societal change?	CHAPTER 6

Before we give the reader a more detailed insight into the research steps in these three studies, we will first explain what Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs] are and what kind of research choices and ethical considerations were made.

1.5 Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice

A discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and (...) a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one. In social science, a

greater number of good case studies could help remedy this situation.
(Flyvbjerg, 2006, referring to the work of Kuhn, p. 242)

Since the aim of this dissertation is to engage critically with a pedagogy of combatting poverty, in which we aim not only to produce theoretical knowledge but also to make the complexities in such a pedagogy tangible, we opted for a 'case study approach' (Baarda, De Goede, & Teunissen, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Mortelmans, 2007). A case study is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a specific case over time. Since this involves in-depth and detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013), it provides a meaningful strategy for gaining an in-depth understanding of our problem statement. As it is important to select a case that contributes to the issue at stake, we selected Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice, since, as we have already stated, these social work organisations embody the engagement of the Flemish government to support the participation of people in poverty as meaningful players in the debate surrounding poverty. As such, these organisations provide a strategically well-chosen and critical case (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In what follows, we will explain the main characteristics of APRVs.

1.5.1 The six criteria of the Poverty Decree

While many APRVs already existed before 2003 (some already existed before the General Report on Poverty of 1994 and an additional one third originated in its aftermath (Dierckx, 2007; Van Robaey, 2004)), they were not structurally subsidised. This changed with the Poverty Decree (2003) since this envisaged the formal acknowledgement and subsidising of those organisations.⁵ The decree states that these are organisations which consist of "mainly poor and other persons, who set out as a goal to contribute to the fight against poverty starting from their own experience" (Poverty Decree, 2003). They should guarantee the participation of people in poverty and the realisation of a process containing the following six concrete goals/subsidising criteria (Network against Poverty, n.d.; Poverty Decree, 2003):⁶

⁵ In Dutch: 'Verenigingen waar Armen het Woord Nemen'. There is no formal translation of the name for these organisations in English. We have used Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice since this provides to a large extent a literal translation, though these organisations are sometimes also mentioned as organisations where people in poverty raise their voice, organisations or associations where people take a stance or take the floor, grass-root organisations or self-advocacy organisations.

⁶ As already mentioned, in the run-up to the Decree, some existing organisations were themselves involved in thinking about and formulating these criteria.

- 1) 'Continue to seek out people in poverty': The organisations should have an active openness to new people in poverty, with intensified efforts for the most isolated.
- 2) 'Enable people in poverty to form an organisation': The organisations should unite people in poverty and people not in poverty, aimed at getting people in poverty out of their societal isolation and reinforce their power. They are attentive to collaborating with other organisations and institutions who focus on people in poverty.
- 3) 'Give voice to people in poverty': In APRVs, conditions should be created so people in poverty can raise their voice, in which the end goal is to become fully-fledged communication partners in society. The organisations should therefore organise activities which offer opportunities to develop these capabilities. In the organisations, people in poverty should be enabled to determine their own rhythm, speed and substance.
- 4) 'Work towards their social emancipation': The APRVs should support people in poverty to grow so they can fully take on their civil rights and make society aware of the parity/equal worth of people in poverty and people not in poverty.
- 5) 'Change social structures': The organisations should stimulate the involvement of people in poverty in policy and the evaluation of societal structures, and stimulate direct contacts between people in poverty and those responsible in society.
- 6) 'Create dialogue and training activities to enhance solidarity between people in and not in poverty': The APRVs should try to achieve solidarity between people in poverty and society. They should therefore organise training activities and actively seek partners in society to exchange knowledge about poverty, starting from the experiences of people in poverty and attempting to expose misunderstandings, prejudice and acts of exclusion.

Today in 2018, 59 APRVs exist in Flanders and Brussels, coordinated by one umbrella organisation, the Network against Poverty (<http://www.netwerktegenarmoede.be/>). This umbrella organisation was also recognised by the Poverty Decree of 2003 in order to support its participatory

goals while stimulating exchange between different APRVs, to organise dialogue with government and to support and coordinate activities which offer insight into the world of people in poverty (Poverty Decree, 2003).

1.5.2 Main characteristics of APRVs

While all APRVs have to fulfil those six specified criteria, they are nevertheless diverse in number of paid employees and volunteers, the sort of activities they develop and their background (Dierckx, 2007; Van Robaeys & Dierckx, 2004), which we will now briefly address.

1.5.2.1 The diversity in genesis

While some APRVs originated after the Poverty Decree, most of them already existed in some shape or form before 2003. One of the big points of difference lies in their origins, regarding which four main categories can be distinguished according to the 'founders' of the organisations.

- First of all, the biggest group of APRVs have their roots in local (parochial) voluntary activities, of which the majority have a long history (genesis in the 1980s or 1990s). Usually, a group of volunteers without poverty experience founded the organisation, amongst whom different logics can be discovered: some problematise that they only reach a small group of people in poverty in their voluntary activities, that assistance services and opportunities to meet for people in poverty are lacking, or that there is too big a fixation on material help in the services already at hand for people in poverty. The need to build knowledge based on the experiences of people in poverty is also found to be important by some of these founding fathers or mothers.
- Secondly, a few organisations were originated by people in poverty themselves, amongst whom different motivations can be found for the genesis of the organisations. Sometimes a feeling existed that there was no specific offering or space for people in poverty in the community. Others created the organisation because they were angry about the persisting presence of poverty. This led to different logics and visions in building the organisations: it might be that they want to create meeting spaces for people in poverty or to function as a connection between people in poverty and society, while some others have put in substantive work towards societal change at the core of their initiative.

- A third category of APRVs found their genesis in the need of an existing organisation/service working around individual support to build specific activities for people in poverty. This is possibly due to the need to work differently on the problem of poverty (for instance, establishing a place for people to meet one another and listen to the experiences of people in poverty), or to adapt to specific problems confronting the organisation (such as an influx of people with different ethnic backgrounds, or refugees).
- Lastly, some of the organisations had their genesis in community development or in a partnership of different organisations that were fixed from the outset on working for structural change. The belief is that regular offers of assistance or services do not suffice since these merely compensate for the problems that people in poverty encounter, or that all these services are too scattered. From such an analysis, APRVs develop out of the networking of organisations or from the project of a specific organisation (most of the time community building) in which a substantial structural component is present from the start.

Regardless of the history and founding basis of each organisation, nowadays they all have to fulfil the six criteria of the Poverty Decree. For some, especially those organisations that had a structural goal from the start, this implied mostly an administrative change. For others, mostly organisations that focused on the goal of bringing burden bearers together, it implied a change in activities towards more substantial group gatherings and a more external focus towards societal change.

1.5.2.2 Activities and vision

APRVs engage in a diversity of activities, themes and partnerships which is dependent on such factors as the questions, concerns and needs of the people they reach, the local community in which they are active and the number of paid employees and volunteers they have. A common ground in all of those activities and beliefs is that APRVs put the participation of people in poverty at the core of their work, making participation not only a goal in society but also a basic premise in their daily practice (Network against Poverty, n.d.).

In general, APRVs make a broad distinction (sometimes explicit, sometimes more implicit) between two core activities: 'low threshold work' and 'substantial policy work'.

- 'Low threshold work' refers to activities which set as a main goal reaching people in poverty, give them a place in the organisation and give them the feeling that they belong in the organisation. This may refer to individual activities (for instance, house visits or individual service moments) and/or to low threshold meeting and group moments (such as weekly open meetings or cooking together). While not an explicit task of APRVs, almost all organisations to some extent also engage in help or service support in some shape or form, evolving from sporadically helping people with questions (such as administration, driving people somewhere) to a fixed offer in some organisations (such as social groceries, a second-hand shop, taking on registration for cultural or leisure passes).
- The 'substantial policy work' almost always involves actively bringing participants of the organisation together in groups to work around a specific theme and working collectively towards societal dialogue. The themes of this substantial work can vary from one organisation to another, but are often linked to a specific social right (such as housing, education, leisure time) and/or to concrete issues facing participants in the organisation (such as what does it mean to live without legal documents). Experiences of participants relating to the right or issue can be discussed while working in the group, and after a while this results in some sort of display or dialogue with external stakeholders (organisations, institutions, policy actors).

While all APRVs combine these two sorts of activity to some degree, a distinction can be made between organisations in respect of their vision as to what the core task of an APRV is. In some, the main focus is on creating a low threshold place where people in poverty can find a safe haven, regain their self-confidence and worth, and strengthen their empowerment. Other organisations also put a growth process central, though actively connect this with the opportunity for people in poverty to participate in policy work and be active agents in working towards societal change.

In APRVs it is clear that low threshold activities frequently reach a wide range of people in poverty (sometimes up to a few hundred when, for instance, the organisation has a recurring foodbank or social groceries), but that the substantial policy work has only a fifth to a tenth of the range of the former.

1.5.2.3 Working with practitioners as well as with volunteers

In almost all APRVs, one or more paid employees work together with volunteers. A handful of organisations do not work with paid employees, with one or several persons taking on overall responsibility for the organisation on a voluntary basis. In the latter, these can also be considered practitioners, since they have the mandate (for instance through board meetings) to shape the organisation, take substantial decisions and so on. Next to these practitioners, almost all APRVs work with volunteers. The volunteers of an organisation may consist of a combination of people with and without poverty experience, or volunteers without poverty experience or participants in the organisation who take on voluntary tasks. Sometimes this voluntary work consists of very fixed tasks or of a structural engagement in the organisation (for instance doing the weekly registration of applications for a cultural pass or giving computer lessons to people), which implies that only some people are considered to be volunteers (as opposed to being a participant). In other organisations, everyone who takes on a small task is regarded as a volunteer (for instance watering the plants, putting out the garbage). In organisations which work with volunteers without poverty experience or with a combination of people with and without poverty experience, voluntary work is also considered worthy from the belief that people can learn from one another as it enhances the understanding of each other's lifeworld.

While all APRVs have one, a few or many volunteers, there is still a difference between practitioners (as stated, mostly paid but sometimes also voluntary) and volunteers, since the core of voluntary work lies mostly in low threshold ground work, while practitioners often support volunteers, have an overview of the practice and are considered to be indispensable in shaping substantial policy work.

1.5.2.4 Training and education

APRVs also invest extensively in training sessions and education for participants and for volunteers of the organisations as well as for external actors. Training for people in poverty may aim to strengthen the capabilities of people in poverty (e.g. learning to work with a computer), to broaden their substantial or practical knowledge (e.g. a course on the services present in a local community), or to educate people about the organisation itself (e.g. what are the six criteria, or how can we come to a collective story). In the organisation, volunteers without poverty experience sometimes also participate in such training or have training courses for themselves (e.g. about the meaning of poverty, or how to do their voluntary

task in practice). Training sessions for external actors are often organised with the aim of improving their knowledge of poverty or a specific component in the lives of people in poverty (e.g. the thresholds in their children's school), and are often provided for care providers or assistance services, politicians and teachers).

1.5.2.5 Collaborating with external partners

Collaborating with others is also very important in APRVs, in which this can serve different goals. Sometimes this appears to be a way of filling a gap in expertise (for instance, working together with an organisation that has juridical expertise concerning a specific theme or issue), but it can also reflect an incentive to bridge the gap between people in poverty and some specific organisations, or set as a goal the creation of a network with other organisations so as to have a bigger structural impact.

1.6 Research choices and ethical considerations

As already stated, this research initially started from an exchange with some employees of the Network against Poverty, who – a decade after the Poverty Decree of 2003 – were primarily in need of deepened insight into what APRVs do in their practice and what the meaning of that work is for people in poverty. Inspired by the need of those employees to get a deeper insight in the daily practice of APRVs, this broad question was somewhat reformulated in our research. In the general vision of APRVs, not only the supporting role for people in poverty but also the changing of social structures and the sensitising of society through the participation of people in poverty stand central (Network Against Poverty, n.d.). This relates to the discussion on which we already elaborated above, namely on where the core focus of social work practices should be – on stimulating individual and/or structural change (Dowling, 1999; Driessens & Geldof, 2009; Hermans, 2009, 2012, 2013) – and on what place the participation of people in poverty should have in these practices (e.g. Beresford, 2010; Beresford & Campbell, 1994; Beresford & Croft, 1995; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2008, 2009; Roets *et al.*, 2012). The focus of the research was therefore defined as being on how meeting the concerns and needs of people in poverty can relate to the transformative goals of APRVs and what place the participation of people in poverty gets in their work.

1.6.1 Participatory research stance

Integrating and merging the knowledge of practitioners in APRVs and the Network against Poverty and of people in poverty, with the scientific and theoretical knowledge of the research team, was considered vital throughout the whole research process. To accomplish this ambition, firstly the research ideas and design were presented and discussed at the 'Board of Directors' and the 'General Meeting of the Network against Poverty', consisting of some external academics and practitioners, but also of representatives from all APRVs (practitioners and/or people with poverty experience). Secondly, two research structures were initiated that aimed at providing a continuing exchange between academic knowledge and the knowledge (practical as well as life knowledge) of practitioners as well as of people in poverty in the process (Krumer-Nevo, 2005).

- An 'Executive Committee': A structure to allow frequent deliberation between representatives of the Network against Poverty and the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy. Here, the day-to-day decisions concerning the research and preparation for the Steering Committee were made.
- 'Steering Committee': A deliberation structure comprising representatives of the Network Against Poverty, the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy and six APRVs. The representatives of APRVs were practitioners (both voluntary and paid) who applied to join the Committee after an open invitation. Some of the practitioners had direct experience of poverty. This group gathered eight times over a period of 3½ years.

Such a participatory research stance was also guiding throughout the whole research process, in which next to the formal exchange channels referred to above, which was reflected in the active continuous efforts of the researcher to dialogue with the research subjects and actively invest in collecting the voices, perspectives and ideas of different players in the field of APRVs, including the knowledge of people in poverty themselves. In this regard, we endorse the plea of Krumer-Nevo, who emphasises that:

Research which ignores the perspective of people in poverty, even if meaningful insights do arise, only contributes to the exclusion of those living in poverty, and thus it is 'part of the problem and not part of the solution'. (Piachaud, 1987 in Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 281)

To oppose and challenge such exclusionary mechanisms, we made the deliberate choice to analyse and represent the perspectives of people in poverty not as a distinct uniform group perspective, but as all part of a diversity of voices and knowledge which in their totality could shed light on the work of practitioners in dealing with the complexity of shaping the work in APRVs.

1.6.2 Ethical dimensions

Throughout this introduction, we have asserted that social work is a normative discipline, committed to the realisation of human rights, social justice and social change. In a similar vein, social work research and social work researchers themselves are never neutral or a “tabula rasa” (Mehta, 2008, p. 237). Researchers take a stance towards the social problems and social practices they investigate, on the sort of questions they want to pose and on the manner in which the research findings are brought into public debate (Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Roose *et al.*, 2016). Poverty research cannot therefore be neutral, but – as is the case in this research – should be centred in a societal commitment towards the fight against poverty and a search for social justice (Lister, 2004; Mehta, 2008; Roets, Roose, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2014). In this light, Krumer Nevo (2017) states that research allows us to question:

our positioning regarding the status quo and choosing whether to strengthen or challenge hegemonic attitudes through our research. Critical reflexivity begins with examining our research questions, continues with examining the methods we employ and concludes with examining the way we present our research. (p. 817)

In this research, such reflexivity was also translated into the openness and continuous attempts of the researcher to reflect on her own assumptions, ideas and beliefs. In this regard, we have already addressed the fact that a participatory research objective guided the whole research process. The researcher sought continuously and actively for exchange between her own knowledge and the knowledge of practitioners, volunteers and participants with poverty experience of the APRVs, in order to bring in, connect and discuss different perspectives in the research (Krumer-Nevo, 2009). Throughout all interactions – be it in formal structures or in informal conversations with participants or practitioners – the researcher tried to be humane and respectful, but also to be attentive to her own role as a researcher (Schiettecat *et al.*, 2014). This also implies that the researcher was open to reflecting on the complexities of conducting research in close collaboration with deprived groups and on power-

related issues throughout the research. We will go more deeply into the consequences of this reflection in the concluding chapter.

From a more procedural point of view, some procedures were also demarcated in the research project – including the different studies (infra), how participants would be informed throughout the research and how data would be gathered and safeguarded. One of the considerations was how to deal with the confidentiality and sensitivity of the research data and information obtained from respondents. We therefore guaranteed that all raw data would be stored in a file only accessible to the researcher, supervisor and co-supervisor. All respondents were assured that information would be anonymised in case of public reporting. All participants in the research were also informed about the purpose, aims, method and data collection. For interviews, the respondents were then invited to give their written formal consent. For focus groups, participants were asked to give their oral consent. For participatory observation, the practitioners were invited to participate after an extended conversation about the study. After checking with their organisation, all organisations gave their oral consent to take part in the participatory observation. At the beginning of every concrete observation, the researcher explained to all those present who she was, what the aim of the research was and how the information collected would be dealt with during the research.

The research project, including these procedures and considerations, was presented to the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. The Committee gave their full approval for the research project.

1.7 In-depth overview of the research process: three studies

Our research was conducted between 2013 and the end of 2017 and consisted of three separate but interconnected studies: the first was a theoretical study with the objective of building a conceptual framework; the second was an empirical study which aimed to gather broad information on the work of all APRVs; and the third study intended to gain an in-depth understanding of the engagement of practitioners in APRVs. As explained above, a 'retroductive approach' guided the whole research process, in which our theoretical concepts, framework and ideas, and empirical fieldwork and data interacted with each another (Downward & Mearman, 2007; Emerson, 2004; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). While the first conceptual study thus influenced some of the empirical research choices made,

the knowledge gathered in our empirical studies also prompted us to reflect on these ideas, to find inspiration in other theoretical ideas and to focus on specific components in the work of APRVs.

In what follows, we will explain all the research steps of the respective studies. However, it might be important for the readers of this dissertation to be aware of the fact that chapters 2 to 6 are presented in the form of articles. This implies that these chapters⁷ also include a methodological section in which the specific choices concerning that particular subject are explained. As such, there is a considerable overlap between these sections and the chronological and more detailed overview which will be presented below.

1.7.1 Study 1: Developing a conceptual framework

Before turning to the empirical study of the concrete engagement of social work practitioners, it was considered to be vital to conduct a conceptual study with the main ambition of developing a framework for considering how participatory social work practices that aim for societal change can be shaped and as such providing a foundation for the empirical research in this research.

At the start of research it is considered to be vital to review the accumulated knowledge concerning the research question. We therefore engaged in a contextual review of the academic literature (Van Hove & Claes, 2011), as this enabled a conceptual clarification of how social work can engage with the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate societal change. As such, we engaged with a broad range of literature concerning this topic. Following the contextual review and as already touched upon in this introductory chapter and further discussed in chapter 2, it became clear that social work practices often try to ignore, solve or escape the inherent complexity of engaging in anti-poverty strategies. On the one hand, they do this by sliding back into participatory strategies that are mainly focused on the integration of individuals into society. On the other, more critical approaches clearly promote a social justice agenda, though it does not always appear evident how these practices can then engage with individual needs and aspirations. This analysis therefore revealed that there was a need for a perspective or conceptual framework that embraced the inherent complexity while trying to fight for social change and social justice.

⁷ In the second chapter this is not explicated as such, in chapters 3-6 it is.

In an attempt to build upon this observation, inspiration was found in the social justice theory of Nancy Fraser (1989, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008), since it provides a theoretical frame of reference that sheds light on the complexity for social work practices of working with people in poverty whose life chances are determined by numerous interimbricated fields of subordination on the economic, cultural and political levels (Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Lister, 2004, 2013; Webb, 2010, 2014). Inspired by the ideas of Fraser, we have therefore advocated a stance in social work that embraces the complexity of aiming for transformation while being aware that it will always have to engage in affirmative strategies in order to meet the needs or aspirations of people living in poverty. From this stance, a conceptual framework was demarcated which argues for a role for social work in the fight against poverty that lies in the creation of 'cultural forums' in which different concerns, experiences and claims of injustice by people in poverty can be discovered and be discussed on a par, and can be projected and represented in society in ways in which their perspectives on the issues surrounding poverty are brought into the debate (see chapter 2).

1.7.2 Study 2: Mapping Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice

To engage in an empirical case study of APRVs, it was considered necessary first to gain a broad insight into the work and context of APRVs (knowledge of the diversity of organisations with regard to their genesis, activities and vision), as well as into the tensions, bottlenecks and complexities practitioners experience in their commitment to participatory principles and practices. To gain such an insight, we invested in some different strategies.

1.7.2.1 Document analysis of APRVs vision statements and operating reports

We first explored the vision statements and operating reports of all APRVs so that we could get an initial sense of who the APRVs were, what they did and how they did it. While there is one general vision statement for all APRVs (Network against Poverty, n.d.), which was made in collaboration with the organisations, some APRVs also have their own vision and/or mission statement which gives a sense of how they perceive and articulate their own work, what focus is brought to the outside world, and how their vision connects with the activities they were undertaking.

All individual APRVs are also obliged to make an operating report annually in order to stay subsidised. In this report – which is in a fixed format – some general

information is required: identification, how many people work there, how many volunteers, how many people they reach and with what organisations they collaborated. Following this general information, their activities should be explicitly connected to the six subsidy criteria:

- 1) For the first criterion 'Continue to seek out people in poverty', APRVs are obliged to specify what kinds of instrument were used to fulfil this goal.
- 2) For the second criterion 'Enable people in poverty to form an organisation', APRVs were required to organise meetings or gatherings for people with and without poverty experience. In the report, they must indicate how many people in poverty and people without poverty experience they reached in different activities.
- 3) APRVs must provide evidence in relation to 'Give voice to people in poverty', in which they have to show that they used appropriate methods (for instance testimonials, theme groups and participating in team meetings) to stimulate the process of raising the voice of people in poverty.
- 4) In the following section the organisations are obliged to provide evidence that they 'Worked towards the social emancipation of people in poverty' by showing that they organised training or information sessions for people in poverty as well as for people not in poverty, and how people in poverty were involved in the latter.
- 5) The APRVs are required to expand on the criterion 'Change social structures' by articulating how they worked thematically to change societal structures, what themes they worked around, who were involved in the group and what results were achieved.
- 6) For the criterion 'Create dialogue and training activities to enhance the solidarity of people in poverty and the non-poor', APRVs have to state how many and what kind of dialogue groups or consultative activities they were involved in or which they organised, how many people in poverty participated, and what actors were involved.

These reports thus provide statistical information (how many took part or were involved), but also give a first glimpse of what themes each APRV works on, who its collaborating partners are and what sort of activities they organise.

1.7.2.2 Interviewing APRV practitioners

While an exploratory document analysis provided some general information on the practices of APRVs, we also conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with practitioners with the objective of obtaining more in-depth insights into the overall history, vision and activities of the organisations, their relationship with participation in the organisation and the complexities that practitioners experienced in shaping their work. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled the exploration of such topics in greater depth, while also providing sufficient space for questions that emerged in the interview on particular matters (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Mortelmans, 2007).

All 59 existing APRVs were invited to express their interest in a qualitative semi-structured interview through an open call launched by the Network against Poverty. The researcher telephoned all the interested APRVs, informing them about the research objectives and explaining that it was crucial that the respondents were actively engaged in shaping the daily activities and had knowledge about the genesis, milestones and complex practices of the organisation. The organisation itself could then make the decision who was best fitted to engage in the interview. While aiming to interview practitioners from a representative range of APRVs in terms of differences in genesis, reach of people in poverty, number of employees and main focus of activities, some organisations were also contacted directly to complete the research sample.

Five main topics were explored in the interviews: the history of the organisation, the perspectives of practitioners on their task in addressing the problem of poverty, the activities they developed, the way in which participation was shaped in the organisation and the challenges they experienced.

In total, 24 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 32 practitioners from 24 APRVs, since in some interviews more than one practitioner took part. Twenty-seven of the respondents were paid employees, four were voluntary practitioners without poverty experience and one a voluntary coordinator with poverty experience. Whilst the practitioners had varying educational and/or professional backgrounds (mostly in social work, but also in psychology and teaching), our motivation for interviewing these respondents was their broad knowledge of the organisation and their active engagement in shaping its activities. In three interviews, practitioners were accompanied by additional respondents as they were believed to be able potentially to give additional insight into the organisation: two chairpersons of two APRVs, one

volunteer with no poverty-experience, and five participants with experience of poverty in two APRVs.

The interviews ranged from 1.5 to 3 hours in length and were fully transcribed, as transcription is a very useful process for turning sound recordings into a text prior to subsequent qualitative data analysis of the research material (Howitt, 2010).

1.7.2.3 Conducting focus groups

The objective of the third cluster of research activities was to gain more specific in-depth knowledge about the complexities in the commitment of practitioners to participatory principles and practices that were expressed during the interviews. We therefore organised five focus groups for practitioners (Mortelmans, 2007; Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011), since the interaction between group members in focus groups “may produce information different in certain respects from that produced by a separate interview” (Van Hove & Claes, 2011, p. 110).

Again, an open call for participation was launched in collaboration with the Network against Poverty, explaining the goal of dialoguing in group about the complexities of shaping participatory activities and goals through APRVs. While also aiming for a diverse and representative sample of APRVs, the focus groups were organised in geographically dispersed places over the five provinces of Flanders in an attempt to provide an accessible location for everybody. Although not obliged to attend the particular group of their region, most respondents participated in their provincial group. Since group members were thus already acquainted with one another without being too familiar, this strengthened the homogeneity of the groups, through which openness towards sharing ideas and perspectives was stimulated (Neuman, 2010).

A diversity of organisations and practitioners took part, varying in individual and organisational background, types of activities, size of organisation and involvement of people in poverty. Despite attempts to involve 6 to 10 respondents in every focus group, some APRVs cancelled at the last moment or did not show up, which made the group interaction in some of the focus groups less than ideal as only a handful of people were present (Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011). In total, five focus groups took place in which practitioners from 22 APRVs and two local collective umbrella organisations (of which the representatives also had active experience in and links to one or more organisation) participated: ten APRVs had already been interviewed in the first

cluster, whereas twelve APRVs and the two umbrella organisations were not represented in the semi-structured interviews. In the focus groups combined, the participants comprised 23 practitioners (of whom one expert by experience), ten participants/volunteers with experience of poverty, one chairperson and one project manager of a collective umbrella organisation. The focus group discussions ranged from 2.5 to 3 hours in length and all were transcribed (Howitt, 2010).

1.7.2.4 Analysing the interviews and focus groups

All of the research data was analysed systematically based on a 'directed approach to qualitative content analysis', which provides an appropriate method for refining a conceptual framework or theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the analysis, our conceptual framework based on the theory of Nancy Fraser guided the analysis (chapter 2), enabling us to identify important common patterns cutting across the diverse interviews and data (Patton, 2002). These were useful for analysing and refining empirical research insights while enabling the construction of new theoretical insights (Mayring, 2000). Here, the enormous complexities of shaping participation in practice while striving for a participatory and transformative goal in society shine through in this analysis (these complexities will be discussed in detail in chapter 3). However, more precisely because of these findings, the analysis also made us determined to gain a deeper insight into APRV practitioners' concrete ways of acting towards these complexities. In what follows, we will therefore discuss the steps that we undertook in this following empirical research study in APRVs.

1.7.3 Study 3: In-depth research on how practitioners deal with the complexity of their work

In this next research phase our aim was to gain a better understanding of how practitioners in APRVs try to shape a critical pedagogy that connects the direct concerns and needs of people in poverty with transformative goals, and how the strategies of practitioners to shape this pedagogy relate to the participation of people in poverty. To gain more clarity on this subject, we conducted participant observation research (Goodley, 1999; Neuman, 2010; Ten Have, 2004; Van Hove & Claes, 2011) in the practice of five APRVs between mid-2015 and mid-2017. In what follows, we will discuss the different strategies of data collection and data analysis in this research study more concretely.

1.7.3.1 Prologue: Involving more perspectives of people in poverty before digging deeper

Before conducting in-depth research on five specific APRVs (infra), we made the choice to organise a group discussion⁸ with ‘veterans’ of different organisations, involving people in poverty who already had many years of experience in their APRV. This was incentivised by a conviction that exploring their perspectives could be important for engaging in this third study with a more focused lens.⁹ In order to reach these veterans, the Network against Poverty addressed some people directly, knowing that they had numerous years of experience, were active in their respective APRV and would be willing to address the work of APRVs verbally. Six veterans participated from four different organisations. In the discussion concerning their experiences of participating in the APRVs, the meaning of participation in APRVs and what their perspectives were on how practitioners should engage with the needs, questions and concerns of people in poverty as well as in the goal of societal change were explored. As such, the information that derived from this discussion provided possibilities to engage in the in-depth study with a clearer lens.

Below, all the choices made for this in-depth study will be addressed in detail.

1.7.3.2 Selecting five different APRVs

As already mentioned, resulting from our findings in the first empirical study, we found it necessary to conduct in-depth research on the actions of practitioners. Therefore we selected five specific APRVs, in which we conducted intensive participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Before going into those research methods, we will explain on what grounds those five APRVs were selected and describe their main characteristics.

In the recruitment of five APRVs we set out some criteria in exchange with the research steering committee. First, an imperative was that it should involve APRVs that were willing to think about and reflect upon the complexity of their work. Furthermore, it was considered vital to engage with a diversity of APRVs, since the research aim was not to analyse the actions of practitioners of one

⁸ We refer to this research step as a group discussion, while the manner of conducting it was similar to the focus groups of the first phase. Nevertheless, here we always had the intention only to organise one group with the aim of exploring some subjects in which the data gathered was not specifically used for the analysis, but had the goal of inspiring and informing the researcher's future steps.

⁹ The perspectives of people in poverty on the work of APRVs in previous empirical study were only captured through their potential participation in an interview or focus groups while accompanying practitioners from the respective APRV or through the steering or daily committee.

APRV in comparison with another, but to be able to analyse the data in a way that gave insight into the complexity of the work of all APRVs.¹⁰ Different components were therefore taken into account, which were also inspired by some of the results of the first research phase, and discussed with the steering committee.

- 'Spread of APRVs': We opted to select an APRV from all five provinces in Flanders, since the work of APRVs is spread out over this whole region. We also took into account that the local context was stated to be important for the work of APRVs (first phase of research), so we took into the equation the geographical location (municipality, big or small city) as well as a sense of the connections with local policy.
- 'Genesis': As mentioned, APRVs have varying historical backgrounds (how long they have existed, on what ground they started their work), so we took this diversity into account when selecting the five APRVs.
- 'Number of paid employees': We selected APRVs that had differing numbers of paid employees, and also two organisations in which a person with poverty experience was employed.
- 'Reach of participants': There is a diversity present in the APRVs in how many people they reach, and in the focus on what specific group they target. For instance, we involved an APRV that focused on people without legal citizenship, since a growing number of APRVs did not work with autochthonous people.
- 'Manner of working/developed activities': While all APRVs respond to the same criteria, there is a difference in what kinds of activity they develop, how they work and what their main themes are. We tried to involve this kind of diversity in our selection.

After considerate deliberation with the Network against Poverty in the Executive Committee about these criteria, five APRVs were selected. These organisations were contacted by the researcher with an invitation to take part in the in-depth research phase, while also explaining the research objectives and focus,

¹⁰ The data and analysis gathered will also be fed back into the larger group of APRVs in focus groups while discussing recognisability and result gaps of diverse perspectives (*infra*).

methods and position of the researcher. While some first deliberated internally, all gave their consent to taking part in the research.

In what follows, we will give a brief overview of the APRVs while bringing the different criteria into account. For more detailed insight in each of the organisations, we refer to the appendix.

APRV 1 Medium-sized city	Pioneer Inspired by ATD-fourth world movement	4,5 practitioners (one expert by experience)	Focus on people from generational poverty	Focus on two main social rights: education and culture
APRV 2 Capital	Activist component from its genesis	2,5 practitioners	Sans-Papiers	Focus on right to housing and precarious situations of people
APRV 3 Small city	Foundation in a social service organisation	2 x 0,5 (one expert by experience)	Steady reach of villagers (+/- 30)	In search of connecting meeting activities to a structural component
APRV 4 Municipality	Foundation in a voluntary organisation	1 practitioner (and an active chair)	Steady big group of villagers (+/-60)	Focus on meeting one another and learning skills. Policy work by chair and practitioner
APRV 5 Medium-sized city	Pioneer Grown out of people in poverty themselves	Coordinator and chair have poverty-experience + 2 x 0,5 practitioners	Steady big group of socially excluded people	Focus on meeting one another Policy work by a handful (coordinator or volunteers)

1.7.3.3 Participatory observations in the five organisations

Since our main research aim is to gain in-depth insight into the complexity of the work of APRVs and the actions of practitioners and since the first research phase was mainly descriptive, we engaged in participatory observations in the five APRVs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011), since this is a technique in which the researcher involves himself/herself intensively in a context under study. In the period September 2015 to mid-2017, eighty observations were conducted. Here, a distinction was made between an exploration phase and an in-depth phase. In the brief 'exploration phase' (September 2015 to January 2016), the researcher – after deliberation with the relevant APRV – went to a broad spectrum of activities (going from low-threshold ground work activities to theme work to meetings with policy makers) to get a sense of the identity and culture of the five APRVs. Following this step, the researcher had conversations with a practitioner from each of the five APRVs in January 2016 about what activities could be observed in the more 'in-depth observational phase'. In line with the research aim, a choice was made to focus more on participatory group activities that aimed to achieve a societal change objective and in which the participation of people in poverty was clearly present. In these observations (February 2016 until mid-2017), the researcher sometimes actively engaged in the group process and became something of a group member, but also often the researcher did not fully participate in the process and took on the role of observing the activities and processes (Van Hove & Claes, 2011). Here, the role of the researcher shifted from "observer as participant" to "participant as observer" and back (Neuman, 2010, p. 433), depending on the expectations of the group and what the activity allowed.

In total, eighty observations took place, 36 in the exploration phase and 44 in the focus phase.¹¹ In every observation, the identity and role of the researcher was made clear to the group in which the researcher was present. Almost all observations covered a time period of 1.5 to 3 hours and all were recorded in a logbook. Here, the researcher took short field notes during the observation and directly afterwards wrote them up more fully in a logbook. This logbook distinguished between an "observational part" and an "interpretation section" covering more analytical statements (Van Hove & Claes, 2011, p.135).

¹¹ A detailed overview of all observed activities per APRV is attached at the end of the dissertation.

1.7.3.4 In-depth interviews on the basis of the participatory observations

Participatory observations allowed us to collect an enormous pile of data about how practitioners shape their work and create strategies to deal with its complexities, and about how this relates to the participation of people in poverty. By not only writing down a factual report on every observation in a logbook but by also continuously reflecting on these observations in the logbook in a separate margin, the researcher got very closely acquainted and connected with the data. After the observational phase, the researcher conducted an exploratory qualitative content analysis of all the data in which next to the empirical data, also the conceptual ideas and perspectives inspired this analysis.

As such, three interconnected key concepts emerged with reference to the role of APRV practitioners in shaping the work and in dealing with its complexities:

- Linking strength-based and empowering environments to structural and transformative objectives;
- Stimulating the development of critical consciousness amongst people in poverty about the collective and unjust nature of poverty;
- Dealing with the complexities of the direct participation of people in poverty while representing their perspectives and concerns in public debate.

The observational phase also made it clear that all these components contained power-related issues concerning the position and participation of people in poverty.¹²

To get a better understanding of these themes, the researcher conducted 29 interviews (one-to-one as well as group interviews) with persons of interest linked to the five organisations. As opposed to the interviews in the first phase of the research, in which interviews were the main data collection strategy, these interviews were employed in conjunction with participatory observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This implied that every interview was conducted with the aim of broadening our knowledge of the role of practitioners, in which our observations

¹² These themes and the inter-imbricated complexity of power will provide the substance of chapters 4 to 6.

on the action of practitioners were brought into conversation in order to enable a better understanding of this role:

- Fourteen group interviews took place with different groups: participants with poverty experience (n=10 – total of 34 respondents), volunteers (n=2 – total of nine respondents) and policy makers (n=2 – total of six respondents). These interviews were group interviews, since this allowed a deepening of results with those groups.
- Thirteen individual interviews with practitioners were conducted as many questions involved concrete observations of their specific ways of acting. These interviews were individual since their substance and the general themes were in every interview personalised through the concrete observed actions of the practitioner in question.
- Two individual interviews were conducted which helped to broaden our knowledge of the role of practitioners: one was conducted with a practitioner from a community-building organisation who worked together with an APRV practitioner; and another interview was conducted with a person who worked in an APRV through an employment project.

In total, 29 interviews were conducted with 64 respondents.¹³ All the interviews were fully transcribed (Howitt, 2010).

1.7.3.5 Focus groups to broaden and discuss the results

The five APRVs were specifically chosen for their diversity in some characteristics in order to enhance the validation of results for all APRVs, since our aim was not to draw conclusions about one specific APRV. From the same objective, we also found it necessary to organise focus groups about some of the preliminary findings, in which they were presented to and questions were asked of the groups (Mortelmans, 2007; Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011). In June and July 2017, three focus groups were organised, one with people in poverty, which addressed the topic of equal worth, and two with practitioners, which discussed concrete overall research findings.¹⁴ The focus group with people in poverty consisted of six respondents from three different

¹³ An overview of the interviews can be found attached at the back of this dissertation.

¹⁴ The original plan was to organize three focus groups with practitioners and three with people in poverty, but owing to difficulties in gathering together people in poverty and some organisational difficulties, only three could take place.

APRVs. In the focus groups with practitioners, respectively seven respondents from seven APRVs (of which one practitioner came from one of the five investigated APRVs), and six respondents from six APRVs participated. All of the focus group discussions ranged from 2.5 to 3 hours in length and all were transcribed (Howitt, 2010).

1.7.3.6 Analysis of all the data in study 2

As was already stated above, a 'retroductive approach' (Emerson, 2004) guided the research process and analysis, which involves "an analysis that employs procedures that are simultaneously deductive and inductive" (Roets *et al.*, 2012a, p. 100). The data generated in the observations and interviews were analysed via a directed approach to qualitative content analysis, offering opportunities to support and extend existing theoretical knowledge and to give meaning to a large quantity of data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002). After unravelling a broad range of nodes concerning the three different themes described above, we found inspiration in theoretical ideas and concepts to analyse our data, as they enabled us to identify focused core subject matter in the data (Patton, 2002) and give language to the actions of practitioners concerning those themes. Here, the ideas of empowerment and enabling niches (chapter 4), the work of Paulo Freire (chapter 5) and the plea of Krumer-Nevo for merging knowledge (chapter 6) provided inspiration for capturing the strategies of practitioners in shaping a pedagogy of combatting poverty, as well as to reflect on the complexities in doing so. This analysis provided the basis for the discussions in the focus groups. All data gathered in those groups in their turn served as additional data and were also analysed through qualitative analysis, providing additional information on the strategies of practitioners. As such, a directed approach in the empirical analysis provided guidance (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) through which key concepts and codes in the analysis were derived from the theoretical ideas. However, the complexity that shines through the data and these key concepts also enabled critical reflection on the theoretical ideas, concepts and frameworks.

1.8 Overview of the chapters

Social research, in simplest terms, involves a dialogue between ideas and evidence. Ideas help social researchers use evidence to extend, revise and test ideas. The end result of this dialogue is a representation of social life – evidence that has been shaped and reshaped by ideas,

presented along with the thinking that guided the construction of the representation. (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p. 57)

Different and evolving layers can be further discovered in this dissertation, in which we first introduce our conceptual framework (chapter 2) and then build on it to discuss it in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs]. We firstly do this in a broad sense by reflecting on the complexities practitioners experience while shaping such participatory forums (chapter 3). Since this chapter only reveals the top of the iceberg, in the following chapters we built upon the second, more in-depth research phase to shed more light on this complexity and engage with some specific themes which relate to the research question of how practitioners in APRVs develop a pedagogy for combatting poverty (chapters 4 to 6).

- ***Chapter 2 – Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums***

In this chapter, the main problem statement of this dissertation – what the potential role can be of social work and social practitioners in the fight against poverty – is tackled conceptually. While investing in this question, we introduce and elaborate broadly on the social justice theory of Nancy Fraser, in which parity of participation is central, and build on her ideas to develop our conceptual framework, in which we conceive the role of social work in the fight against poverty as the creation of cultural forums. This chapter is to be seen as the backbone of this whole dissertation.

- ***Chapter 3 – Social work, poverty and participation: Exploring the ‘how’, the ‘who’, and the ‘what’ of supporting the participatory parity of people in poverty***

In the third chapter, we discuss the main complexities of supporting participatory parity in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice by drawing on the first phase of the research, in which we conducted interviews with practitioners of 38 APRVs. Here, we build on the ideas of Fraser on the ‘who’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ of social justice to connect analytically with the challenges that are experienced in APRVs concerning participation. As such, it is revealed that creating and shaping such cultural forums in APRVs is intensely complex and power-related issues should not be underestimated.

- ***Chapter 4 – Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice as a distinct space to combat poverty with people in poverty: From being on a par to participating on a par?***

While a politics of recognition and respect is argued to be vital for contemporary social work, some scholars stress that this should always be connected to material and political components of poverty. In this chapter, we therefore tackle the question of how practitioners can create strength-based environments that enable the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty, while linking such contexts to structural and transformative objectives. Here, we argue that recognition and empowerment of people in poverty is enabled not only through the active creation of niches in which participants are addressed on their strengths in daily practice, but also through the conception of the transformative potential of such niches, in which people in poverty are positioned as indispensable active partners in the fight against injustice.

- ***Chapter 5 – Raising critical consciousness in the struggle against poverty: Breaking a culture of silence***

Since one of the findings of the first research phase reveals that practitioners struggle with how to involve people in poverty while working towards societal change, in this chapter we investigate how practitioners in APRVs engage in this issue. We draw on the vital ideas of Paulo Freire with regard to the development of a pedagogy and participatory praxis that takes into account, yet also transcends, processes of internalisation and alienation in social work practice and engages in breaking a 'culture of silence'. We also shed light on how the participatory and dialogical beliefs and ideas of Freire relate to the power position of the practitioners in APRVs.

- ***Chapter 6 – Learning to play chess: How to make sense of the participatory representativeness of the life knowledge of people in poverty when aiming for societal change***

The idea of creating cultural forums is elaborated upon in the first two chapters, in which social work is said to engage in a politics of representation to bring the experiences of people in poverty into public debate. While combining the perspectives of Fraser with the more practice-based ideas of Krumer-Nevo, we aim to gain deeper insight into the worth, complexities and tensions of the participation of people in poverty in such representation processes and how this

complexity relates to the role of social practitioners of those organisations in trying to bring about societal change.

▪ **Chapter 7 - Conclusion**

In the concluding chapter we integrate the main findings of the research in the hope of stimulating further reflection on two topics: firstly, on the topic of areas of choice in research concerned with poverty and the role of social work in the fight against poverty; and secondly, on how social work practices can engage critically and through a participatory approach in the fight against poverty, in which we try to offer some main building blocks and reflection themes concerning a pedagogy of combatting poverty.

1.9 References

- Baarda, D.B., de Goede, M.P.M., & Teunissen, J. (2005). *Basisboek kwalitatief onderzoek. Handleiding voor het opzetten en uitvoeren van kwalitatief onderzoek*. Groningen: Stenfert Kroese.
- Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness. Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society. Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Beresford, P. (2002). User involvement in research and evaluation: Liberation or regulation? *Social Policy and Society*, 1(2), 95–105.
- Beresford, P. (2010). Public partnerships, governance and user involvement: A service user perspective. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34, 495–502.
- Beresford, P., & Campbell, J. (1994). Disabled people, service users, user involvement and representation. *Disability & Society*, 9(3), 315–325.
- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (1995). It's our problem too! Challenging the exclusion of poor people from poverty discourse. *Critical Social Policy*, 15, 75–95.

- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (2004). Service users and practitioners reunited. The key component for social work reform. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(1), 53–68.
- Bogdan, C., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research in education. An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2003). Een rechtenkader als referentiekader. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock, & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 1–20). Gent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek. Een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Roose, R., Coussée, F., & Bradt, L. (2014). Learning democracy in social work. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 43–54). London: Springer.
- Cantillon, B. (2011). The paradox of the social investment state: Growth, employment and poverty in the Lisbon era. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 21(5), 432–449.
- Cantillon, B., & Van Lancker, W. (2013). Three shortcomings of the social investment perspective. *Social Policy and Society*, 12(4), 553–564.
- Carey, A. (2003). Beyond the medical model: A reconsideration of 'feble-mindedness', citizenship, and eugenic restrictions. *Disability & Society*, 18(4), 411–430.
- Carey, M., & Foster, V. (2011). Introducing 'deviant' social work: Contextualising the limits of radical social work whilst understanding (fragmented) resistance within the social work labour process. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(3), 576–593.
- Clarke, J. (2005). New Labour's citizens: activated, empowered, responsabilized, abandoned. *Critical Social Policy*, 25(4), 447–463.
- Cook, D. (2002). Consultation, for a change? Engaging users and communities in the policy process. *Social Policy & Administration*, 36(5), 516–531.

- Cools, P., Leggio, D.L., Matras, Y., & Oosterlynck, S. (2017). 'Parity of Participation' and the politics of needs interpretation: Engagement with Roma migrants in Manchester. *Journal of Social Policy*. Advance Access published 25 July 2017. doi: 10.1017/S0047279417000575
- Copeland, P., & Daly, M. (2012). Varieties of poverty reduction: Inserting the poverty and social exclusion target into Europe 2020. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22(3), 273–287.
- Cornwall, A., & Brock, K. (2005). What do buzzwords do for development policy? A critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(7), 1043–1060.
- Craig, G. (2002). Poverty, social work and social justice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 32(6), 669–682.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cruikshank, B. (1999). *The will to empower: Democratic citizens and other subjects*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Davies, K., Gray, M., & Webb, S. (2014). Putting the parity into service-user participation. An integrated model of social justice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 119–127.
- Davis, A., & Wainwright, S. (2003). Combating poverty and social exclusion: Implications for social work education. *Social Work Education*, 24(3), 259–273.
- Dean, H. (2007). The ethics of welfare-to-work. *Policy and Politics*, 35(4), 573–590.
- Dean, H. (2010). *Understanding human need. Social issues, policy and practice*. University of Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Dean, H. (2013). The translation of needs into rights: Reconceptualising social citizenship as a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(S1), 32–49.

- De Corte, J., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work as a policy actor: understanding social policy as an open-ended democratic practice. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access online 20 April 2018.
- De Corte, J., Roose, R., Bradt, L., & Roets, G. (2018). Service users with experience of poverty as institutional entrepreneurs in public services in Belgium: An institutional theory perspective on policy implementation. *Social Policy & Administration*, 52(1), 197–215.
- De Rynck, F., & Dezeure, K. (2009). *Burgerparticipatie in Vlaamse steden. Naar een innoverend participatiebeleid*. Brugge: Vanden Broele.
- De Swaan, A. (1988). *In care of the state*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B.F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314–321.
- Dierckx, D. (2007). *Tussen armoedebeleid en beleidsarmoede. Een retrospectieve en interventiegericht analyse van de Vlaamse beleidspraktijk*. Leuven: Acco.
- Donzelot, J. (1984). *L'invention de Sociale*. Paris: Fayard.
- Doom, R. (2003). Armoede: Een essay van de open deur. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock, & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 245–272). Gent: Academia Press.
- Dowling, M. (1999). Social exclusion, inequality and social work. *Social Policy & Administration*, 33(3), 245–261.
- Downward, P., & Mearman, A. (2007). Retrodution as mixed-methods triangulation in economic research: Reorienting economics into social science. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(1), 77–99.
- Driessens, K., & Geldof, D. (2009). Individu en/of structuur? Of wat wil het sociaal werk aanpakken? In J. Steyaert & W. Verzelen (Eds.), *Canon van het sociaal werk in Vlaanderen*. Retrieved from <https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/essays/Driessens%20Geldof%20-%20Individu%20en%20of%20structuur.pdf>

- Dwyer, P. (2004). Creeping conditionality in the UK: From welfare rights to conditional entitlements? *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(2), 265–287.
- Emerson, R. (2004). Working with key incidents. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 457–72). London: Sage.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Eurostat (n.d.). *Main tables*. Retrieved from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/main_tables
- Eurostat (2013). *Key figures on Europe. 2013 digest of the online Eurostat yearbook*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-EI-13-001/EN/KS-EI-13-001-EN.PDF
- Featherstone, B., Broadhurst, K., & Holt, K. (2012). Thinking systemically – thinking politically: Building strong relationships with children and families in a context of rising inequality. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(4), 618–633.
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry: QI*, 12(2), 219–245.
- Fook, J. (2002). *Social work: Critical theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Fox, D.M. (1968). Introduction. In S.N. Patten (Ed.), *The new basis of civilization*. The John Harvard Library: Belknap.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition. Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.

- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Fraser, N. (2008). Abnormal justice. *Critical Inquiry*, 34(3), 393–422.
- Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A genealogy of dependency. Tracing a keyword of the U.S. Welfare State. *Signs*, 19(2), 309–336.
- Fritzell, J., & Ritakallio, V.M. (2010). Societal shifts and changed patterns of poverty. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 19, S25–S41.
- Garrett, P.M. (2002). Social work and the just society. Diversity, difference and the sequestration of poverty. *Journal of Social Work*, 2(2), 187–210.
- Garrett, P.M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(5), 1517–1533.
- Goodley, D. (1999). Disability research and ‘researcher template’: Reflections on grounded subjectivity in ethnographic research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 5(1), 24–46.
- Gray, M. (2013). The swing to early intervention and prevention and its implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(7), 1750–1769.
- Gray, M., & Webb, S.A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(1), 111–115.
- Grunwald, K., & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of ‘lifeworld orientation’ for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23(2), 131–146.
- Gupta, A., Blumhardt, H., & ATD Fourth World (2017). Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: The contribution of ‘the politics of recognition and respect’. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 17 February 2017. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1287669
- Handler, J.F. (2003). Social citizenship and workfare in the US and Western Europe: From status to contract. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 13(3), 229–243.

- Harris, J. (2008). State social work: Constructing the present from moments in the past. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(4), 662–679.
- Hermans, K. (2009). De complexe relatie tussen sociaal werk en sociaal beleid ontrafeld. In J. Brodala, G. Cuyvers, A. Devillé; & G. Van den Eeckhaut (Eds.), *Met een dubbele lus: Prikkelend nadenken over sociaal werk* (pp. 131–146). Garant: Antwerpen-Apeldoorn.
- Hermans, K. (2012). Structureel sociaal werk. Strijden tegen sociale ongelijkheid. *Alert*, 38(1), 8–14.
- Hermans, K. (2013). Structureel werken in het sociaal werk. Over bruggenbouwers en hemelbestormers. *Alert*, 39(2), 25–34.
- Houston, S. (2016). Empowering the 'shamed' self: Recognition and critical social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 16(1), 3–21.
- Howitt, D. (2010). *Introduction to qualitative methods in psychology*. Loughborough University: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hsieh, H.F., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2012). *Poverty eradication and the role for social workers*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/policies/poverty-eradication-and-the-role-for-social-workers/>
- International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Jacobs, T. (1984). Van gunst naar recht: *Fasen in de overgang van de middeleeuwse naar de hedendaagse welzijnszorg*. Retrieved from https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/1976_OCMW/1984,%20Van%20gunst%20naar%20recht_ThJacobs.pdf
- Jones, C. (2002). Social work and society. In R. Adams, L. Dominelli, & M. Payne (Eds.), *Social work: Themes, issues and critical debates* (pp. 34–43). Hampshire/New York: Palgrave MacMillan in association with The Open University.

- Jordan, B., & Jordan, C. (2000). *Social work and the third way: Tough love as social policy*. London: Sage.
- Jordan, B. (2008). Social work and world poverty. *International Social Work*, 51(4), 440–452.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2005). Listening to ‘life knowledge’: A new research direction in poverty studies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 99–106.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2008). From ‘noise’ to ‘voice’: How social work can benefit from knowledge of people living in poverty. *International Social Work*, 51(4), 556–565.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2009). From voice to knowledge: Participatory action research, inclusive debate and feminism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(3), 279–295.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty and the political: Wrestling the political out of and into social work theory, research and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(6), 811–822.
- Krumer-Nevo, M., Weiss-Gal, I., & Levin, L. (2011). Searching for poverty-aware social work: Discourse analysis of job descriptions. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(2), 313–332.
- Kwekkeboom, M.H. (2010). *De verantwoordelijkheid van de mensen zelf. De (her)verdeling van de taken rond zorg en ondersteuning tussen overheid en burgers en de betekenis daarvan voor de professionele hulpverlening*. Amsterdam: HVA Publicaties/Amsterdam University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.lectorenzorgenwelzijn.nl/oraties/2010,%20Kwekkeboom,%20oratie%20.pdf>
- Lister, R. (2002). A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision making that affects their lives. *Social Policy & Society*, 1(1), 37–46.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Lister, R. (2013). 'Power, not pity': Poverty and human rights. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), 109–123.
- Lorenz, W. (2006). *Perspectives on European social work: From the birth of the nation state to the impact of globalization*. Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich.
- Lorenz, W. (2007). Practicing history. Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work*, 50(5), 597–612.
- Lorenz, W. (2008). Paradigms and politics: Understanding methods paradigms in an historical context. The case of social pedagogy. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(4), 625–644.
- Lorenz, W. (2014). *The need for a new social question*. Public lecture given at Ghent University on 20th March 2014.
- Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 4–17.
- Lorenz, W. (2017). European policy developments and their impact on social work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(1), 17–28.
- Maesele, T. (2012). *From charity to welfare rights? A study of social care practices* (Doctoral dissertation). Ghent: Ghent University.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social workers as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Mehta, L. (2008). Over the rainbow: The politics of researching citizenship and marginality. *Action Research*, 6(2), 233–253.
- Mestrum, F. (2011). Child poverty. A critical perspective. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 161–168.
- Michielse, H.C.M., & Van Krieken, R. (1990). Policing the poor: J.L. Vives and the 16th century origins of modern social administration. *Social Service Review*, 64(1), 1–21.

- Millar, M. (2008). Anti-oppressiveness: Critical comments on a discourse and its context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 362–75.
- Mortelmans, D. (2007). *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*. Leuven: Acco.
- Mullaly, B. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Network against Poverty (n.d.). *Gewoon mens mogen zijn!* Retrieved from <http://netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Visietekst-Vlaams-Netwerk.pdf>
- Neuman, W.L. (2010). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- O'Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work*, 1(1), 143–158.
- Offe, C. (1984). *Contradictions of the welfare state*. London: Hutchinson & Co.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Postle, K., & Beresford, P. (2007). Capacity building and the reconception of political participation: A role for social care workers? *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), 143–158.
- Ragin, C.C., & Amoroso, L.M. (2011). *Constructing social research. The unity and diversity of method*. London: Sage.
- Richter, M., & Andresen, S. (2012). *The politicization of parenthood: Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Rimlinger, G.V. (1983). Capitalism and human rights. *Daedalus*, 112(4), 51-79.

- Roets, G., Dean, H., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (in press). Disability rights and disability studies in social work. Uncovering different interpretations of rights and needs of people with learning disabilities in social work practice. In F. Kessel, W. Lorenz, H.U. Otto, & S. White (Eds.). *European Social Work: A Compendium*. Opladen/Berlin/Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2014). Theorising underlying notion of citizenship in the dynamics of learning in Public Policy Units. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 181–194). London: Springer.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2013). Researching child poverty: Towards a lifeworld orientation. *Childhood*, 20(4), 535-549.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., Claes, L., Vandekinderen, C., Van Hove, G., & Vanderplasschen, W. (2012a). Reinventing the employable citizen: A perspective for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(1), 94–110.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy and Administration*, 46(7), 807–822.
- Roose, R. (2006). *De bijzondere jeugdzorg als opvoeder* (Doctoral dissertation). Ghent: Academia Press.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social work: In search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592–1607.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., Schiettecat, T., Pannecoucke, B., Piessens, A., Van Gils, J., & Vandekinderen, C. (2016). Social work research as a practice of transparency. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(6), 1021–1034.
- Rosanvallon, P. (2000). *The new social question. Rethinking the welfare state*. Princeton: University Press.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). *Paradigmatische verschuivingen en methodologische discussie in (kinder)armoedeonderzoek* [VLAS-Studies 16]. Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.

- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandebroek, M. (2015). Do families in poverty need child and family social work? *European Journal of Social Work*, 18(5), 647–660.
- Simpson, L. (2007). Ghettos of the mind: The empirical behaviour of indices of segregation and diversity. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 170(2), 405–424.
- Spiesschaert, F. (2005). *Ervaringsdeskundige in armoede en sociale uitsluiting. Een inleiding tot de methodiek*. Leuven: Acco.
- Taylor, C. (1992). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of Recognition* (pp. 25–73). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor-Gooby, P. (2011). Politics of risk-taking: Welfare state reform in advanced democracies. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40, 194–196.
- Taylor-Gooby, P., Dean, H., Munro, M., & Parker, G. (1999). Risk and the welfare state. *British Journal of Sociology*, 50(2), 177–194.
- Ten Have, P. (2004). *Understanding qualitative research and ethnomethodology*. London/Thousand Oaks/Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Thompson, S. (2006). *The political theory of recognition*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Thompson, S. (2009). On the circularity of democratic justice. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 35(9), 1079–1098.
- Turner, R. (2008). *Neo-liberal ideology*. Edinburgh: University Press Edinburgh.
- Vandebroek, M. (2006). The persistent gap between education and care: A 'history of the present' research on Belgian child care provision and policy. *Paedagogica Historica*, 42(3), 363–383.
- Vandebroek, M., Coussée, F., & Bradt, L. (2010). The social and political construction of early childhood education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(2), 139–153.
- Van Ewijk, H. (2010, November 8th). *Maatschappelijk werk in een sociaal gevoelige tijd*. Amsterdam: Humanistic University Press. Retrieved from

https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/1994_wetenschap_leerstool/2010%20Hans%20van%20Ewijk%20Maatschappelijk%20werk%20in%20een%20sociaal%20gevoelige%20tijd.pdf

Van Hove, G., & Claes, L. (2011). *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

Van Lancker, W. (2013). Putting the child-centered investment strategy to the test: Evidence for EU27. *European Journal of Social Security*, 15, 4–27.

Van Robaeys, B., & Dierckx, D. (2004). Een 'tableau vivant' van armoedeverenigingen. In J. Vranken, K. De Boyser, D. Geldhof, & G. Van Menxel (Eds.), *Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting: Jaarboek 2004* (pp. 341–356). Antwerp: Acco.

Veit-Wilson, J. (2000). States of welfare: A conceptual challenge. *Social Policy & Administration*, 34(1), 1–25.

Villadsen, K. (2007). The Emergence of 'neo-philanthropy': A new discursive space in welfare policy? *Acta Sociologica*, 50(3), 309–323.

Vranken, J. (1998). Van 'moderne armoede' naar 'sociale uitsluiting': Een verkenning van begrips- en beleidsontwikkelingen. In J. Vranken (Ed.), *20 jaar OCMW: naar een actualisering van een maatschappijproject* (pp. 63–77). Leuven: Acco.

Vranken, J. (2001). Unravelling the social strands of poverty: Differentiation, fragmentation, inequality, and exclusion. In H.T. Andersen & R. Van Kempen (Eds.), *Governing European cities. Social fragmentation, social exclusion, and urban governance* (pp. 71–88). Ashgate: Aldershot.

Vranken, J., De Boyser, K., & Dierckx, D. (Eds.) (2003). *Armoede en sociale uitsluiting. Jaarboek 2003*. Leuven: Acco.

Vranken, J., & Geldof, D. (1992). *Armoede en sociale uitsluiting. Jaarboek 1991*. Leuven/Amersfoort: Acco.

Webb, S.A. (2010). (Re)assembling the left. The politics of redistribution and recognition in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2364–2379.

- Webb, S.A. (2014). *Social work and the politics of recognition*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/4489946/Social_Work_and_the_Politics_of_Recognition
- Williams, F. (1999). Good-enough principles for welfare. *Journal of Social Policy*, 28(4), 667–687.
- Wilson, A., & Beresford, P. (2000). 'Anti-oppressive practice': Emancipation or appropriation? *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(5), 553–573.
- Winance, M. (2007). Being normally different? Changes to normalization processes: From alignment to work on the norm. *Disability & Society*, 22(6), 625–638.

CHAPTER 2

Social work, poverty and anti-poverty
strategies: Creating cultural forums

ABSTRACT

Although social work has been assigned a pivotal role in the fight against poverty, it is also criticised for adjusting to the retrenchment of the welfare state and its weakening concern in issues of social justice. Hence, critical questions concerning its positioning towards the tension between securing and changing the underlying assumptions of the social order are pertinent. We theorise this issue while drawing on the work of Nancy Fraser, who advocates a politics of redistribution, recognition and representation, and identifies affirmative and transformative ways of dealing with injustices. Based on this theory, our central argument is that social work often tries to escape or ignore the complex nature of its engagement in the fight against poverty by sliding into one-sided affirmative or transformative anti-poverty strategies. We argue that social work should attempt to embrace reflexively the inherent tensions in which it is caught when dealing with the problem of poverty, rather than try to find ways to escape from these tensions and ambiguities. From this stance, a role for social work might be the creation of cultural forums in which public debate about the problem of poverty is stimulated.

Based on Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcy006

2.1 Introduction

The majority of European welfare states currently acknowledge that poverty is a structural, multi-dimensional and material reality that persistently disfigures and constrains the lives of millions of citizens (Libor & Nowalski-Kapuscik, 2015; Lister, 2004). In that vein, poverty is commonly perceived as a violation of human rights and a form of social injustice (O'Brien, 2011). Although the importance of a structural perspective has been stressed in the rhetoric of policy makers, the complexity of fighting poverty in social practices and interactions in contemporary welfare states often results in a cult of individualism, fostered by the politics of neoliberalism, that reduces the question of how to achieve social solidarity to a matter of individual effort" (Lorenz, 2014, p. 1). As social work practices unfold within these contentious environments, a critical consideration of the pivotal role of social work in the development of anti-poverty strategies remains a vital issue (Payne, 2005; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015). This is reflected in the global definition of social work (IFSW, 2014) which places the principles of social justice and human rights at the heart of social work:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

The IFSW also refers to the long history of social work's commitment to the eradication of poverty: "In practice all over the world, social workers' concern about poverty has increased because of their long history in working with the marginalized, or excluded, those lacking resources, scenarios which push them to poverty situations" (2012). Whereas this commitment is sometimes direct, for instance in community care or anti-poverty movements (e.g. Bradshaw, 2007), poverty can also form a more indirect ground for intervention, for instance in practices of child welfare and protection that aim to support families in situations of poverty (e.g. Bradt *et al.*, 2015).

Notwithstanding the diversity of practices and rationales for social work interventions in relation to poverty issues and situations, the global definition explicitly states that social work engages people and structures to address life

challenges and enhance wellbeing. This engagement has been the subject of a charged yet pertinent debate since the early days of social work and has been described as a historically rooted tension, as social work aimed at social justice is caught in a never-ending story of striking a balance between changing the individual and changing the structural forces (Lorenz, 2007; Villadsen, 2007). In our view, the debate so far has frequently resulted in quite polemical standpoints as regards the vexed question as to whether social work can actually combat poverty by empowering individuals or should, rather, invest in changing the structural and conditions in which people in poverty live (e.g. Dowling, 1999; Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Pierson, 2016). Many critical social work scholars have rightly argued that poverty should primarily be seen as a structural problem of major social inequalities with respect to the lack of redistribution of material as well as immaterial resources (e.g. Garrett, 2002; Lister, 2002; Piketty, 2014). In their commitment to working with people in poverty, social workers often witness such widespread issues of deprivation and inequality, which urges them “to think hard about inequalities and poverty in our society and what they can do about it” (Pierson, 2016, p. 2). We therefore want to engage in the discussion on how social work can realise its social justice aspirations while accepting that social work is always intrinsically involved in the ambiguous activity of challenging both the individual and structural forces (Lorenz, 2007), while “simultaneously [considering] the rights and aspirations of the individual citizen and collective welfare, solidarity and equality in a democratic society” (Roose, Roets, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2012, p. 1593).

In an attempt to capture and reconsider the social justice aspirations of social work in relation to poverty and anti-poverty strategies, we theorise this issue while drawing on the work of *Nancy Fraser* (1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2010) and a number of writers in the field of social work who have been inspired by her work (e.g. Davies, Gray, & Webb, 2014; Garrett, 2010; Marston & McDonald, 2012; Webb, 2010). Rather than continuing the discussion of the merits and demerits of anti-poverty strategies that aim at changing either individuals or structural forces, Fraser shifts the terms of the debate as she perceives individuals as “nodes of convergence for multiple, cross-cutting axes of subordination” (Fraser, in Garrett, 2010, p. 1523). As such, her work “theoretically illuminates the sheer complexity of social work practice with a panoply of individuals and groups whose lives (and life chances) are determined by where they are positioned, or stationed, in terms of a number of differing, but intersecting, forms of stratification” (Garrett, 2010, p. 1524). In the present article, we therefore argue that the tension between ‘affirmative’ and ‘transformative’ strategies for redressing social injustice, which is also identified and discussed

by Fraser (1995, 2005), might offer a convincing set of ideas for theorising a potential key role for social work in its pursuit of anti-poverty strategies and social justice. Similarly, we argue that social work should attempt to create 'cultural forums' for public debate, in which the power relationships and underlying framework of the social order can be challenged and changed in transformative ways.

2.2 Changing welfare state regimes and social work

The concept of poverty is a 'normative construct' (Lister, 2004), and the ways in which poverty and anti-poverty policy making are defined and pursued are influenced by prevailing welfare regimes (Roets *et al.*, 2012). Since a growing group of citizens appears to be at risk of ending up in poverty and becoming dependent on the social welfare system, it has been argued that prevailing welfare paradigms and anti-poverty strategies should be revised as the welfare state has been gradually redefined as a major generator of risk (Beck, 1992; Rosanvallon, 2000). A number of European welfare states have shifted their focus from social protection and redistribution of resources and power to human capital investment strategies (Cantillon, 2011). In these developments, the fact that the social and economic risks people encounter are structural in origin is often ignored, since the premise that the welfare state is responsible for the redistribution of resources to enable the wellbeing of people shifts to a focus on individual responsibility. As such, the second-class citizenship of people in poverty risks being translated as a problem of deviant individuals, who are expected to become productive citizens within the scope of self-responsibility and self-governance (Clarke, 2005). This can lead to a discursive separation between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (Handler, 2003; Pierson, 2016; Villadsen, 2007). With regards to social work practice, this emphasis on the individual responsibility of citizens in maintaining their own welfare has made rights and citizenship increasingly conditional on the individual (Dwyer, 2004). Similarly, social work research shows that rights are also frequently translated by social work as social obligations (Handler, 2003; Maesele, 2012). As examples of the conditionality of social rights, the Belgian welfare state recently introduced the requirement to speak the formal Dutch language or the willingness to learn it for citizens as a condition to be eligible for social housing, the willingness to accept all work offered, irrespective of the quality of employment, as a condition to receive an unemployment benefit that degressively decreases; and the demand to do voluntary community work as a condition to receive welfare benefits. Due to the inability to deal with the crisis of

the welfare state (Mullaly, 2007), other – and new – so called anti-poverty strategies are coined by social work, and might refer to the re-emergence of ‘neo-philanthropy’ (Maesele, 2012; Villadsen, 2007). Examples include the provision of food banks and social groceries where people in poverty who are considered to be deserving and willing to accept this aid are offered direct relief.

Such challenges make it vital for social work to think about “where it stands as a profession” (Pierson, 2016, p. 37), in which critical questions concerning how social work positions itself in relation to the tension between securing and changing the underlying assumptions of the social order are highly pertinent. Since social work is not merely a technical activity or an executor of policy, the potential of social work to be a normative activity in pursuit of a socially just society should be embraced (Mullaly, 2007). As Garrett (2002) asserts, “how social workers respond to issues connected to social justice is an issue of international significance for the profession” (p. 187). We will elaborate further on these topics in the following section.

2.3 Revealing the social justice aspirations of social work

Davies *et al.* (2014) have argued that “the underpinnings of social justice are complex and contentious” (p. 121). In that sense, the work of Fraser (1995, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2010) mainly offers an abstract theoretical frame of reference that is not easily applicable in social work theory, policy and practice. In our view, however, it provides a productive set of ideas that matches “the more persuasive accounts of the multi-faceted nature of oppression and subjugation present in the discourse of social work” (Garrett, 2010, p. 1517), and can therefore serve as a source of inspiration in theorising the potential role of social work in the fight against poverty.

2.3.1 Three dimensions of social injustice

According to Fraser (2005), social justice crucially refers to ‘parity of participation’, since “justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life” (p. 73). Fraser’s social justice framework explicitly includes three crucially interimbricated dimensions of social injustice that can impede this parity. She argues that injustices that confront individuals and groups are rooted in the economic, cultural and political realms. Economic injustice concerns the ‘maldistribution’ of material resources between groups

(e.g. income inequality, subordinate living conditions) resulting from economic structures. On the cultural level, injustice is about 'misrecognition' and concerns ideologies and standards, or "institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value" (Fraser, 2010, p. 16) that constitute some actors in the political order "as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible – in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction" (Fraser, 2000, p. 113). On the political level, injustice is about 'misrepresentation', when "political boundaries and/or decision rules function to deny some people, wrongly, the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction" (Fraser, 2005, p. 76). This misrepresentation can occur at the political level, where justice is about the possibility of equal political participation, but can also occur at the meta-political level. The latter is called 'misframing' and can be defined as arising in situations where "polity's boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly deny some people the chance to participate at all in its authorized contests over justice" (Fraser, 2008, p. 408). Although these three domains of injustice are analytically distinct, Fraser (2005) argues that in reality they influence one another:

Thus, maldistribution and misrecognition conspire to subvert the principle of equal political voice for every citizen, even in polities that claim to be democratic. But of course the converse is also true. Those who suffer from misrepresentation are vulnerable to injustices of status and class. Lacking political voice, they are unable to articulate and defend their interests with respect to distribution and recognition, which in turn exacerbates their misrepresentation. (p. 79)

From this perspective, societies appear as complex fields that encompass economic, cultural and political forms of ordering and stratification. In that sense, Fraser (1995, 2005) argues that only by considering these dimensions can one determine what is impeding parity of participation. Social justice therefore requires a transformative 'politics of representation' that is closely inter-imbricated with a 'politics of recognition' and a 'politics of redistribution'. She argues that these politics should be founded on helping to create the conditions for what she terms 'parity of participation'; which implies "politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the (...) party as a full member of society capable of participating on a par with the rest" (2000, p. 113) and that these analyses should be viewed as part of the political aspiration to transform and change the world (Garrett, 2010).

2.3.2 Affirmative and transformative ways of dealing with injustice

Fraser (2005) emphasises the necessity of reflexivity regarding how societies enable or disable parity of participation, and how welfare states deal with the obstacles that impede parity of participation. Relying on a “process notion” (Fraser, 2005, p. 87), she asserts that social arrangements can be considered according to their democratic legitimacy of whether they permit all relevant social actors to participate as peers in social life. These arrangements should enable all those concerned to participate as peers in the processes of deliberation about these norms. In that sense, Fraser identifies two ways of dealing with injustices: ‘affirmative’ and ‘transformative’. Affirmative strategies deal with the implications of injustices without challenging unequal social relations, or put another way, “remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). By contrast, transformative strategies are about changing the way society is organised and aim at restructuring the underlying framework (Fraser, 2005). Transformative strategies are therefore “remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework” (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). It is here that Fraser highlights ‘parity of participation’ as an essential principle:

(...) does the society's structural-institutional framework (...) permit all to participate as peers in social interaction? Or does it institutionalize patterns of advantage and disadvantage that systematically prevent some people from participating on terms of parity? Do the society's institutionalized patterns of cultural value create status hierarchies, which impede parity of participation? Does its economic structure create class stratification, which also forecloses the possibility of parity? (Fraser et al., 2004, p. 378)

Since, as Fraser emphasises, this parity can be compromised on these different injustice levels, it is important to reflect on the strategies that might be available to deal with them.

In what follows, we use Fraser's analytical framework to elaborate on the contemporary responses of social work towards questions of social (in)justice. We argue that, on the one hand, many social work practices engage in affirmative strategies while dealing with issues of poverty, pulling back from the ambition of transforming societal mechanisms that generate social

injustice. On the other hand, social work sometimes specifically aims to develop radical or structural strategies that are perceived as inherently transformative, but that eventually can lose sight of the individual needs and the concerns of service users. In both responses, our argument entails that it is problematic if social work tries to escape or ignore the complex and dual nature of affirmative and transformative elements in its engagement in anti-poverty strategies.

2.3.3 Affirmative social work strategies in dealing with poverty as a social problem

Social work has become highly involved in a 'politics of recognition' (Garrett, 2010; Lister, 2002; Webb, 2010). This interest of social work in the ethics and politics of recognition is intelligible and is based on the acknowledgement that, in contemporary times, people in poverty share experiences of not being recognised as full citizens in social interactions in European societies, which leads to their "second class citizenship" (Lister, 2004, p. 165). Just like many other marginalised groups, "people in poverty have been, and are, systematically denied dignity, self-esteem and recognition" (Garrett, 2010, p. 1526). "Rather than defining group belonging in static terms", Fraser emphasises the endorsement of "the dynamic and continuous processes of collective identification that are an essential part of group membership" in the politics of recognition (Petoukhov, 2013, p. 76).

However, in contemporary societies, these politics are mostly approached via the "identity model" (Fraser, 2000, p. 109). This implies that recognition is often referred to as an individual and vital human need, where misrecognition is found to be damaging for the development of individuals (Taylor, 1992). It is consequently argued that groups of people who are not recognised by the dominant culture develop a troubled identity. In this approach, recognition is about repairing "internal self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture's demeaning picture of the group" (Fraser, 2000, pp. 109-110). According to the dominant conceptualisation of recognition that adopts this identity model, social policy emphasises the search for individual and collective identity while relying on the self-responsibility of individuals (Baistow, 2000). As such, many practices in social work are influenced by a psychosocial understanding of recognition (Garrett, 2010), with a focus on the individual's self-governance and self-realisation (Villadsen, 2007; Webb, 2010). Fraser (2000) points out that the translation of recognition in an identity model gives rise to practices that set the development of personal identity and optimal self-realisation as the core goals. She also states that the growing focus on recognition during recent decades has

led to the decoupling of the economic and cultural domains of social justice, which is now dominated by a cultural understanding that she calls the “problem of displacement” (2000, p. 108). In the engagement in such approaches, social work might be involved in empowering individuals, families and communities, however transformative questions are tackled less often (O’Brien, 2011). Where Lister (2002) stated that the growing importance of a politics of recognition might provide opportunities for the acknowledgment of these people as ‘second class citizens’ without being blind to the lack of material resources in poverty situations, struggles for recognition might entail that the problem of poverty and the ways to fight it are extracted from the power structures within society (Baistow, 2000; Lister, 2004; Webb, 2010). As Oliver (2004, in Garrett, 2010) argues, “struggles for recognition and theories that embrace those struggles may indeed presuppose and thereby perpetuate the very hierarchies, domination, and injustice that they attempt to overcome” (p. 1525).

A similar critique can be raised when social work’s “objective is to correct the existing income inequality by facilitating transfer of material resources to the maligned group” (Pethoukov, 2013, p. 75) without tackling the societal conditions in which this happens. In the case of Flanders, Belgium, such redistributive remedies are reflected in the increasing engagement of social work in material support systems such as food or clothing support (cheap meals, foodbanks and second-hand shops). Although these remedies can be of great value to individuals, they “do little more than ameliorate the difficulties experienced by oppressed groups” (Stepney, 2006, p. 1291). The engagement of social work in the creation of alternative socioeconomic systems (e.g. alternative currencies, social grocery stores and social restaurants) can also be questioned if these projects neglect to position themselves critically towards the societal order. This concern is exemplified in recent research by Ghys (2016), in which he showed that social work that supports social restaurants emphasises the function of emergency relief for people in poverty in their work, while largely ignoring a commitment to the structural fight against poverty. As such, many social work practices that have redistributive aims do not “challenge the deep structures that generate class disadvantage” (Fraser, 1995, p. 85).

2.3.4 Transformative social work strategies in dealing with social problems: the solution?

Many contemporary social work practices, being aware of the fact that social work is ‘a dog that didn’t bark’ (Jordan & Jordan, 2000), also aim to be radical and transformative. As such, a revival of so-called radical and structural

approaches in social work is noticeable (e.g. Garrett, 2010; Gray & Webb, 2009; Ferguson, 2008; Millar, 2008; Mullaly, 2007; Stepney, 2006). Although diverse in approach and in vision (e.g. anti-oppressive social work, radical social work, new structural social work), these approaches have their main starting point on the transformation of structures in society rather than on changing individual characteristics (Mullaly, 2007). In these approaches, distributive and oppressive mechanisms in society are questioned and it is argued that social work should combat or resist structural exclusion mechanisms on a micro- and/or macro-level (Hermans, 2013). For instance, anti-oppressive practice profiles itself as a “fundamentally different view of the nature of the problems and solutions that should be central to social work” (Millar, 2008, p. 364). It positions itself as a counter-movement to the dominance of identity politics in social work, based on the critique that notions of social division are no longer given prominence and it is necessary to take “a social view of social issues” (Jordan in Millar, 2008, p. 366). Similarly, Mullaly’s *New Structural Social Work* (2007) acknowledges the dual task of social work, which combines helping people while simultaneously transforming society and formulates approaches to deal with this dual task. He positions structural against conventional social work and, as such, attempts to create an alternative identity for social work as a structural response to social problems.

However, questions can be raised as to what this standpoint implies for social work practice and the search for a unified structural identity for social work in relation to Fraser’s theoretical ideas about “transforming the deep structures of both political economy and culture” (1995, p. 93). First, there can be a gap between the idea of striving for a structural approach and the development of practices in social work that try to convey this idea in reality, since “there has also been some recognition of the apparent dissonance between the pursuit of a critical social work agenda, on the one hand, and the practical realities that constrain and govern social work activity” (Millar, 2008, p. 363). For instance, anti-oppressive work uses the paradigm of empowerment but it is questionable whether its conceptualisation leads to transformative social work in practice (Roose *et al.*, 2012). Second, Millar (2008) stated that, for example, “discussions on ‘anti-oppressiveness’ tended to oversimplify a complex relationship between structural oppression and individual service users’ experiences and needs” (p. 363). As Krumer-Nevo (2016) aptly argued, “the structural paradigm tends to abandon the interpersonal relationship” (p. 1805). While taking this concern into account, questions could be raised about recognising the meaning of strategies in social work practice aimed at the direct relief of the needs and concerns of

people in poverty, and whether or not they contribute to affirmation of the societal order.

2.3.5 Embracing complexity in social work

We have argued that the engagement of social work practice in the development of anti-poverty strategies frequently results in affirmative efforts, complying with societal mechanisms or discourses without challenging or changing the underlying framework of the social order in transformative ways. On the contrary, the attempt of social work to create radical or structural approaches, frameworks and practices to transform society engenders a tangible risk of ignoring the lifeworlds of people in poverty themselves and, as such, discrediting potentially affirmative strategies in social work. Rather than trying to solve or ignore the complexity of engaging in anti-poverty strategies, Lorenz (2007) emphasises the importance of dealing with complexity for the profession via commitment to understanding and addressing social problems. Although poverty, as a social problem, is far too big for social work to solve, he stipulates that it is also not an option for social work to give up its fight for social justice. We therefore argue that social work should attempt to embrace reflexively the inherent tensions in which it is caught when dealing with social problems, rather than try to find ways to escape from these tensions and ambiguities. When these tensions and ambiguities are perceived as an opportunity for social work, this stance might offer a unique option: “every answer to social problems remains incomplete in any case because it is, in a sense, just an answer that opens up new possibilities, questions and limitations” (Roose *et al.*, 2012, p. 1600). For instance, the affirmative strategies of social work in offering food support might contribute to the pacification of the problem of poverty when these practices merely compensate for material deprivation because people in poverty are urgently in need of this relief, without questioning the underlying societal mechanisms. Nevertheless, such strategies can offer transformative potential if social work brings them into the public debate while framing them as necessary for the relief of people and also framing the need for such relief as unjust in its essence. As such, questioning social problems “might be more essential than the answer, as every answer holds the potential to shift evident meanings and to transform realities into provocative issues” (Roose *et al.*, 2012, p. 1600).

2.4 Fraser meets social work: creating cultural forums

Following on from the vital question of how to embrace this provocative complexity, the key role of social work might be to create 'cultural forums', being perceived as spaces "where private concerns are translated into public issues" (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015, p. 151, own translation). Cultural in this sense is to be understood as co-constructing the meaning of practices and experiences in everyday life practices, while focusing not only on the concrete life-worlds of people in poverty but also on the relation between their perspectives with the bigger societal context and dominant discourses and demands in society (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). This conceptualisation does justice to how social work might also stimulate public debate in the fight against poverty, which we will refer to as a commitment to a politics of representation. This implies that in creating such forums, claims of people in poverty on the different injustice domains should not only be discussed in practice, but can and should be submitted to "democratic processes of public justification" (Fraser, 2000, p.119), by which public debate on the problem of poverty is enhanced. In that sense, Fraser (1990) provides inspiration for how the creation of cultural forums might be conceptualised in social work practice, when she points out that what should count as a matter of common concern can only be decided through discursive contestation in public spheres or publics, implying that issues "that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels 'private' and treats as inadmissible in such spheres" (p. 77), should also be included. Such publics then designate arenas or theatres "in which political participation is enacted" (p. 57) through the articulation, exchange and discussion of private and public concerns by individuals and groups. Starting from the ideal of parity of participation, she argues for the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of publics in which such discursive contestation can take place, as opposed to one overall public sphere; since the latter would, in reality, "effectively privilege the expressive norms of one cultural group over others" (p. 69).

We believe that social work is in a privileged position to give voice to "those silent and oppressed groups or publics whose voice is drowned out by more vocal and powerful publics" (Dean, 2013, p. S42). This perspective is based on Fraser's idea of 'subaltern counterpublics' implying "discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990, p. 67). Where subaltern counterpublics might be considered

by the broader society as opposing forces, social work might have a specific quality since it obtains its mandate partially from the welfare state to shape the relationship between private troubles and concerns and public issues and concerns (Lorenz, 2016; Mills, 1959). Here social work can be perceived as “a veritable laboratory for examining the effects of poverty” (Pierson, 2016, p. 40) and thus carries the potential to provide “a mode for discursive struggle” (Dean, 2004, p. 200) for different social justice claims and concerns. By everyday encounters with people who experience injustices in inter-imbricated economic, cultural and political domains, social work should not only create opportunities to voice the powerless in practice, but also create cultural forums in which different voices – dominant and countervoices – meet and interact and are deliberated upon. Hence, social work has to take on an active role in challenging injustices in the different domains of social justice by engaging in reframing and projecting individual and collective concerns and lifeworlds of people in poverty “from the private sphere of commodities and market relations, on the one hand, and family and personal relations, on the other, into the public forum of political debate” (Dean, 2013, p. S42). Referring to the example of food support once again, it implies that – while relieving the urgent material needs of people in poverty – social work can also seize opportunities in those practices to explore and discuss their lifeworlds, questions and concerns on the basis of parity, yet frame this relief as problematic in terms of poverty and social inequality in a wider public debate.

2.4.1 Creating cultural forums through Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice

Notwithstanding the promising theoretical idea of creating cultural forums to stimulate public awareness of, and debate on, the problem of poverty, this idea requires an empirical translation to refine and enrich our conceptual framework. We are currently attempting to provide depth to these theoretical terms in a current qualitative research project in ‘Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice’ [APRVs] in Belgium, which provides a highly relevant case study of how social workers think and act when they support and create cultural forums. APRVs depart from the definition that poverty is “a complex set of instances of social exclusion that stretches out over numerous areas of individual and collective existence” (Vranken, 2001, p. 86). As such, poverty is related to a lack of resources as well as to the limited possibilities of people in poverty to participate in various social areas such as income, labour, public services, ... APRVs therefore work with a variety of people with different experiences of poverty, while sometimes targeting some specific groups (people from

generational poverty, low-income ethnic minorities...). Starting from the claim that the welfare rights and well-being of people in poverty are not realised in practice, APRVs pursue social justice and social change based on participatory principles and practices that are central to their endeavours (Bouverne-De Bie, Claeys, & Vanhee, 2003).

In our research project, we theorise the creation of cultural forums in terms of the APRVs who try to support people in poverty to share their life experiences, and following try to represent and project individual as well as shared experiences on poverty in a wider public debate. This commitment of social workers opens up possibilities for the emergence of a more collective sense of social justice, as space is created to give the knowledge that is reflected in individual and shared experiences on injustice a “collective push for systemic change” (Dalrymple & Boylan in Pierson, 2016, p. 49).

In this regard, APRVs initiate public discussions and engage in ‘politics of representation’ with a wider audience in numerous ways. For example, representatives of APRVs often actively take part in consultation groups initiated by the local authorities to discuss issues concerning social policy with different stakeholders (policy makers, service providers, ...). Many APRVs also initiate exchange between different stakeholders themselves. One organisation for instance organised a consultation group about the thresholds for people in poverty to participate in cultural and leisure time activities, in which actors of the local and national cultural field and local policy makers were invited to join this initiative. Another strategy involves sensitizing actions to bring experiences of people in poverty into the broader public arena. A striking example here is what happens on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17th of October), where almost all APRVs engage in public actions and demonstrations to frame poverty-related issues as socially unjust. Some APRVs organise a public procession in the community while calling out some of their collective problems, others develop more playful actions such as an activity on a public square where passers-by can spin the ‘wheel of misfortune’ and discover some distressing facts about poverty in their community. In another APRV, hundreds of participants and supporters publicly challenged the waiting list for social housing by all standing in a line in front of the city hall. In all these actions, efforts are made to involve the local and national press, which is most of the time successful. APRVs also engage in activities throughout the year to stimulate public debate about the problem of poverty. This is for instance the case when an APRV organises a public hearing in the community regarding the evolutions in anti-poverty-policies, in which people in poverty share their own experiences

and life stories that inspire public debate with policy makers as well as with citizens of the community. Essential is that all of these strategies of representation are initiated together with people in poverty and serve the purpose of raising public awareness of the problem of poverty without stigmatising people in poverty.

2.4.2 Parity of participation in the creation of cultural forums

In its fight for social justice, social work should not only consider parity of participation as an ideal, but also be aware of the complexity of translating such an ideal into practice. For example, how can social workers ensure that they do not reproduce existing power inequalities? Who will actually listen to the voices of people in poverty and create social change, and how will such forums connect with government officials or other powerful actors? What if the projection, reframing and representation of both individual and collective concerns for recognition, representation and redistribution in public debate “leave the agenda to be set by people whose power has been so much taken for granted” (Phillips, 2004, p. 37), and the oppressive power relationships, structural inequalities and injustice rooted in the cultural, political and economic structure of society are not challenged in transformative ways? Similarly, Markell (in Garrett, 2010) provides an insightful criticism, arguing that it is tricky to divert “attention from the role of the powerful, of the misrecognizers ... focusing on the consequences of misrecognition rather than on the more fundamental question of what it means to commit it” (p. 1525).

Therefore it seems quintessential to engage in empirical research that explores how social work frames its own strategies and the claims and concerns of people in poverty, and which claims for social justice might be considered as relevant and why (Marston & McDonald, 2012). Thus, a critical consideration of the role of APRVs as a producer and circulator of power struggles that are associated with the different domains of social justice is vital (Webb, 2010), since social practitioners might experience major complexities in their commitment to shape such participatory forums in practice. In our study on APRVs (Boone, Roets, & Roose, 2018), the bottlenecks in creating such forums are researched while relying on the work of Fraser (2005) who has made her work more concrete while emphasising that questions should be raised not only about ‘what’ should count as a just ordering of society, but also meta-level questions on the ‘who’ and ‘how’ of social justice are necessary. Dealing with questions such as “what constitutes a just distribution of wealth and resources? What counts as reciprocal recognition

or equal respect?" (Fraser, 2008, p. 396) intrinsically require questions about "who counts as a subject of justice in a given matter? Whose interests and needs deserve consideration? Who belongs to the circle of those entitled to equal concern?" (Fraser, 2008, p. 399). Moreover we should not only treat the boundaries of the 'what' and the 'who' of justice in critical ways, but also the ways in which the boundaries are drawn, and think about how we should determine the grammar to reflect on justice: 'the how' (Fraser, 2008).

2.5 Concluding reflections

In this article we have stipulated that social work can only fail by engaging in one-sided affirmative or transformative anti-poverty strategies, as poverty is far too complex as a social problem to solve. However, we have also argued that this impossibility should be embraced in social work practices. From this stance, a role for social work might be the creation of 'cultural forums' in which the different experiences of injustice of people in poverty are discussed on a par and public debate about the problem of poverty is stimulated. Nevertheless, as we have argued, the appearance of neo-liberal regimes and the evolution from social towards active welfare states have influenced the commitment of social work towards social justice. Precisely those evolutions are what make the commitment of social work to the creation of cultural forums so important. This idea squares with Lorenz's (2016) call for social work to (re)claim a critical stance and raise what he calls the 'social question anew' in changing circumstances: "In every act of intervention social workers therefore address not just "private troubles" but treat them in relation to public issues (...). 'Social' means building and respecting bonds and reciprocity beyond the personal sphere (...) as the subject of reflexive negotiations. In practice this means that clashes of interests in the social sphere is unavoidable" (p. 1525). Because social work has a mandate to shape the relationship between 'the private' and 'the public', this implies that social work can either one-sidedly comply with such evolutions, or alternatively can try to use this position to strengthen its engagement in social justice by creating such forums, and thus attempt to disrupt hegemonic discourses about the meaning of poverty and strategies to fight poverty so that these discourses lose their dominance in being seen as self-evident and inevitable (Marston & McDonald, 2012).

2.6 References

- Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness. Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek. Een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Claeys, A., & Vanhee, J. (2003). *Armoede en participatie*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Bradshaw, R. (2007). Theories of poverty and anti-poverty programs in community development. *Community Development*, 38(1), 7-25.
- Bradt, L., Roets, G., Roose, R., Rosseel, Y., & De Bie, M. (2015). Poverty and decision-making in child welfare and protection: deepening the bias-need debate. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(7), 2161–2175.
- Cantillon, B. (2011). The paradox of the social investment state: growth, employment and poverty in the Lisbon era. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 21(5), 432–449.
- Clarke, J. (2005). New Labour's citizens: Activated, empowered, responsabilized, abandoned. *Critical Social Policy*, 25(4), 447–463.
- Davies, K., Gray, M., & Webb, S. (2014). Putting the parity into service-user participation. An integrated model of social justice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 119–127.
- Dean, H. (Ed.). (2004). *The ethics of welfare: Human rights, dependency and responsibility*. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press.

- Dean, H. (2013). The translation of needs into rights: reconceptualising social citizenship as a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(S1), 32–49.
- Dowling, M. (1999). Social exclusion, inequality and social work. *Social Policy & Administration*, 33(3), 245–261.
- Dwyer, P. (2004). Creeping conditionality in the UK: From welfare rights to conditional entitlements? *Canadian Journal of Sociology-Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie*, 29(2), 265–287.
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition. Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Fraser, N. (2008). Abnormal justice. *Critical Inquiry*, 34(3), 393–422.
- Fraser, N. (2010). Injustice at intersecting scales. On “social exclusion” and the “global poor”. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 13(3), 363–371.
- Fraser, N., Dahl, H.M., Stoltz, P., & Willig Source, R. (2004). Recognition, redistribution and representation in capitalist global society: An interview with Nancy Fraser. *Acta Sociologica*, 47(4), 374–382.
- Garrett, P. M. (2002). Social work and the just society. Diversity, difference and the sequestration of poverty. *Journal of Social Work*, 2(2), 187–210.
- Garrett, P. M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(5), 1517–1533.

- Ghys, T. (2016). *Sociale innovatie en structurele armoedebestrijding*. Universiteit Antwerpen: Antwerpen.
- Gray, M., & Webb, S. A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(1), 111–115.
- Handler, J. (2003). Social citizenship and workfare in the US and Western Europe. From status to contract. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 13(3), 229–243.
- Hermans, K. (2013). Structureel werken in het sociaal werk. Over bruggenbouwers en hemelbestormers. *Alert*, 39(2), 25–34.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2012). *Poverty eradication and the role for social workers*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/policies/poverty-eradication-and-the-role-for-social-workers>.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work>.
- Jordan, B., & Jordan, C. (2000). *Social work and the third way: Tough love as social policy*. London: Sage.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Libor, G., & Nowalski-Kapuscik, D. (2015). *Poor Europe: The problem of poverty in chosen European countries*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Slasciego: Katowice.
- Lister, R. (2002). A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision making that affects their lives. *Social Policy and Society*, 1(1), 37–46.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lorenz, W. (2007). Practicing history. Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work*, 50(5), 597–612.

- Lorenz, W. (2014). *The need for a new social question*. Public lecture given at Ghent University on 20th March 2014.
- Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 4–17.
- Maesele, T. (2012). *From charity to welfare rights? A study of social care practices* (Doctoral dissertation). Ghent: Ghent University.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social workers as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Millar, M. (2008). Anti-oppressiveness: Critical comments on a discourse and its context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 362–75.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mullaly, B. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Canada: Oxford University Press.
- O' Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work*, 1(1), 143–158.
- Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Petoukhov, K. (2013). Recognition, redistribution and representation. Assessing the transformative potential of reparations for the Indian residential school experience. *McGill Sociological Review*, 3, 73–91.
- Phillips, A. (2004). Identity politics: Have we now had enough? In J. Andersen, & B. Sim (Eds), *The politics of inclusion and empowerment: Gender, class and citizenship* (pp.36-48). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pierson, J.H. (2016). *Tackling poverty and social exclusion. Promoting social justice in social work*, London, Routledge
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the 21st century*. Cambridge MA: Belknap Press.

- Rosanvallon, P. (2000). *The new social question. Rethinking the welfare state*. Princeton: University Press.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy and Administration*, 46(7), 807-822.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social work: in search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592-1607.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2015). Do families in poverty need child and family social work?. *European Journal of Social Work*, 18(5), 647–660.
- Stepney, P. (2006). Mission impossible? Critical practice in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(8), 1289–1307.
- Taylor, C. (1992). The politics of recognition. in A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 25-73). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Villadsen, K. (2007). The emergence of 'neo-philanthropy': A new discursive space in welfare policy? *Acta Sociologica*, 50(3), 309–323.
- Vranken, J. (2001). Unravelling the social strands of poverty: Differentiation, fragmentation, inequality, and exclusion. In H.T. Andersen & R. Van Kempen (Eds.), *Governing European cities. Social fragmentation, social exclusion, and urban governance* (pp. 71-88). Ashgate: Aldershot.
- Webb, S. A. (2010). (Re)assembling the left. The politics of redistribution and recognition in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2364–2379.

CHAPTER 3

Social work, participation and poverty:
Exploring the 'how', the 'who', and the
'what' of supporting the participatory
parity of people in poverty

ABSTRACT

Although participatory social work approaches have been considered as a fruitful strategy, critical questions are raised in relation to the social justice aspirations of participatory social work with people in poverty. Inspired by the work of Nancy Fraser, we provide an in-depth insight in the complexities of supporting participatory parity in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice. Combining semi-structured interviews and focus groups with practitioners in these organisations, we shed light on the complexities of the 'how', the 'who', and the 'what' of social justice that arise in such participatory practice.

Our findings suggest that even in practices that situate the principle of participatory parity at the heart of their fight for social justice, power asymmetries and social inequalities require attention. Exclusionary mechanisms become apparent in how practitioners try to support participatory parity of people in poverty in the different components in the organisation. When practitioners try to overcome these exclusionary effects, a sheer complexity and inescapable power-struggles become visible. Moreover, the ambiguity of how practitioners attempt to empower people in poverty and to enhance structural change leads to tensions between affirmative and transformative strategies in the fight against poverty.

Practitioners should be aware that they will never be able to resolve or escape inherent complexities in their attempts to work on a par with people in poverty. Nevertheless, it remains valuable to make continuous efforts to inform the public debate about the socially unjust nature of poverty and social inequality in our societies.

3.1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, the importance of the participation of people in poverty in research, policy, and social work has been emphasised (Beresford, 2002; Beresford & Croft, 2004; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2016; Lister, 2002, 2004; Mehta, 2008). According to Bouverne-De Bie, Roets and Roose (2013), the essence of poverty implies that people in poverty are excluded from the process in which poverty and anti-poverty strategies are defined, and poverty should therefore be seen as a 'structural problem of non-participation'. In that vein, Doom (in Bouverne-De Bie, Claeys, & Vanhee, 2003) approaches poverty as a problem of unequal power relationships, implying that people in poverty experience a lack of resources and institutional power and are granted only a passive position in the social system. Moreover, Freire (1970) argues aptly that non-poor people who actually have some power to bring about social justice and social change often, and quite unintentionally, also maintain the status quo. Premised on the idea that people in poverty are experts in poverty (Lister, 2004), the proponents of participatory approaches have claimed that engaging with people in poverty in democratic ways embodies a fruitful and valuable strategy for gaining an in-depth understanding of the complex and multi-faceted nature of poverty as a social problem. Furthermore, it is argued that listening to their life knowledge "offers a unique potential contribution to the overall corpus of knowledge because it reflects the point of view of people at the fringes of society concerning their own lives, as well as society and its primary institutions" (Krumer-Nevo, 2005, p. 100), and enables a cross-fertilisation of the existing knowledge of poverty with the life knowledge of people in poverty. Also in the field of social work, it is increasingly acknowledged that social work can benefit from the knowledge of people in poverty as subjects or participants rather than mere objects of intervention (Krumer-Nevo, 2005). This focus on participation has led to a diversity of participatory approaches that have been implemented in practice, such as using testimonials from people in poverty to inspire social work practices and social policy makers, the participation of people in poverty in the planning of activities, and the formal participation of people in poverty in internal board meetings.

Nevertheless, these participatory principles and practices have also been scrutinised and viewed with scepticism. For instance, research shows that the formal participation of people in poverty in policy-making does not necessarily contribute to effective anti-poverty strategies (Davies, Gray, & Webb, 2014;

Postle & Beresford, 2007), since it can be conceived as primarily instrumental (Roets *et al.*, 2012), and participatory ventures may evolve as “little more than tokenism or a ‘box ticking’ exercise rather than meaningful involvement” (Beresford, 2010, p. 499). In that vein, Cornwall and Brock (2005) emphasise that participation may be no more than a ‘buzz-word’, referring to the ambiguous finding that people in poverty are frequently granted political agency as a means of subtly exercising social control. Participation can evolve as a disciplinary and controlling approach when policy and practice are seeking to construct citizens who are committed to a personal responsibility based on the expectation that they make the desired social change on their own (Baistow, 2000; Suijs, 2012). Since “animating struggles for equality, rights and social justice” (Cornwall & Brock, 2005, p. 1057) is of vital importance in the field of social work; such an instrumental and tokenistic approach runs the danger of eroding the critical meaning and significance of participatory principles and practices (see also International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014). These questions and critiques are especially relevant since social work was recently sharply criticised for inappropriately seeking to advance contemporary social justice claims and social change and for depoliticising social issues (Garrett, 2002; Marston & McDonald, 2012; Postle & Beresford, 2007).

Therefore, in this article, we attempt to articulate how a more productive and political approach to participation in social work can also be constructed, combining both theoretical and empirical insights. In that sense, we rely on the theoretical work of Nancy Fraser and mainly explore the relevance of her promising concept of ‘parity of participation’, which has recently served as a source of inspiration for a diversity of scholars in the field of social work. We consequently formulate our research objectives and discuss the findings emerging from our qualitative research on ‘Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice’ [APRVs] in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium).

3.2 Participating on a par: an exploration of the work of Nancy Fraser

Nancy Fraser (1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2010) coined the concept of ‘parity of participation’ in an inspiring social justice framework. She argues that a society is just only if there is parity of participation, since “justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life” (Fraser, 2005, p. 73). Fraser (2005) emphasises the necessity of reflexivity about how societies

enable or disable parity of participation, in which overcoming injustice “means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction” (p. 73). She identifies three domains of injustice: the cultural, the economic, and the political (Fraser, 1995, 2005). Since societies appear as complex fields that encompass not only cultural and economic forms of ordering, but also political social arrangements, Fraser (2005) argues that only by considering these distinct though interimbricated dimensions can one determine what is impeding parity of participation. As such, she claims that it is not merely the case that some participatory parity is impeded by a lack of resources or that the voices of people are misrecognised but also that the issues of social justice that are affecting them are misframed (Fraser, 2010). Participatory parity therefore requires, according to Fraser (2010), a radical ‘politics of representation’ that is closely inter-imbricated with a ‘politics of recognition’ and a ‘politics of redistribution’. By establishing participatory parity as a normative social justice orientation, this politics of representation submits claims for recognition and redistribution “to democratic processes of public justification” (Fraser, 2000, p. 119). As such, “the political” can be conceived as “the stage on which struggles” in the different injustice domains can occur (Fraser, 2005, p. 75).

A politics of representation, however, also requires that questions on the substantive level of social justice are explored with reference to the ‘who’, the ‘how’, and the ‘what’ of the fight for social justice. She argues that for a long time, the dominant focus was on “what should count as a just ordering of social relations within a society” (Fraser, 2005, p. 70-71). This substantive level addresses questions such as “what constitutes a just distribution of wealth and resources? What counts as reciprocal recognition or equal respect?” (Fraser, 2008, p. 396). Political injustice on this level is called “ordinary-political misrepresentation” and occurs when political decision rules “wrongly deny some of the included the chance to participate fully, as peers” (Fraser, 2005, p. 76). Fraser not only emphasises that sufficient engagement in social justice demands first-order questions on the ‘what’ of social justice but also asserts that meta-level questions on the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ of social justice are necessary. With reference to the ‘who’ issue, political misrepresentation occurs when the boundaries of the community are drawn in a way that wrongly excludes some people from the chance to participate at all in “its authorized contests over justice” (Fraser, 2008, p. 408), which is referred to as ‘misframing’. Questions surrounding this issue address “who counts as a subject of justice in a given matter? Whose interests and needs deserve consideration? Who belongs to the circle of those entitled to equal concern?” (Fraser, 2008, p. 399). Moreover, an

adequate politics of representation should address another question, namely the 'how' (Fraser, 2008), since in a globalising world we should treat not only the boundaries of the 'who' of justice in critical ways, but also the ways in which the boundaries are drawn, and think about how we should determine the grammar to reflect on justice. As such, the politics of representation crucially addresses interrelated questions about 'who', the 'how', and the 'what' of social justice.

3.3 Fraser meets social work

Notwithstanding the rather philosophical nature of her work, Fraser has recently inspired numerous scholars in the field of social work, often concerned with the issue of poverty (Boone, Roets, & Roose, 2018; Davies *et al.*, 2014; Dean, 2013; Garrett, 2010; Marston & McDonald, 2012; Webb, 2010). Owing to the lack of space we experience here to represent and discuss in detail all the diverse implications of how Fraser's work has been received by scholars in the field of social work, we try to summarise how her ideas in relation to participatory parity have deeply inspired social work scholars. In line with the work of Fraser, Lister (2002) not only emphasises the need to think about representative democratic means but advocates for "the provision of public space in which voices of different groups can be heard", and a participatory and deliberative democratic praxis can occur (p. 40). Social work could occupy a privileged position in striving for parity of participation and social justice through a politics of representation in which a so-called cultural forum can be created as a space where the private concerns of people who experience injustice in inter-imbricated cultural, economic, and political realms are translated into public issues. Krumer-Nevo (2016) has also recently emphasised the importance for 'poverty-aware social work' of embracing, representing, and reframing the perspectives of people in poverty "on social structure, social institutions and social constructions of poverty to the society at large" (p. 1803). Moreover, it is argued that for practitioners concerned with poverty issues it is vital that they are aware of how poverty relates to dimensions of structural inequality and "to accept that what Nancy Fraser terms 'struggles for recognition' also need to be 'integrated with struggles for redistribution, rather than displacing and undermining them'" (Garrett, 2002, p. 200, quoting Fraser, 2000, p. 187). Such a politics of representation might engender transformative potential, since social work can reframe, project, and (re-)politicise the lifeworlds, experienced injustices and concerns of people in poverty "from the private sphere of commodities and market relations, on the one hand, and family and personal relations, on the other, into the public forum of political debate" (Dean, 2013, p. S42). As we have

argued elsewhere (Boone *et al.*, 2018), however, social practitioners may experience major tensions, bottlenecks, and complexities in their commitment to supporting and shaping such participatory ventures. A pertinent consideration in the development of anti-poverty strategies might therefore be to pose questions concerning which situations are defined as poverty, and on what grounds and with what arguments are they defined as such, and also consider what the contributions are of diverse actors in this process (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2013). As Marston and McDonald (2012) accordingly argue, the depoliticisation of social issues such as poverty requires us to focus attention on how social practitioners act when the 'how', the 'who', and the 'what' of social justice are all in dispute.

3.4 Research objectives

Our research focuses on gaining in-depth insight into how social practitioners attempt to support the participatory parity of people in poverty while dealing with the 'how', the 'who', and the 'what' of social justice and social change in a specific social work practice, namely, Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs]. These organisations offer a highly relevant case study since the starting point of the work of social practitioners in these organisations is to support the participatory parity of people in poverty and to stimulate social justice and structural social change while engaging in a politics of representation (Network against Poverty, n.d.). While offering a rich description of the insightful explanations of practitioners regarding how they think and act when they shape a politics of representation in APRVs, we aim to produce a deep understanding of the tensions, bottlenecks, and complexities that social practitioners experience in their commitment to participatory principles and practices.

3.5 Research methodology

In Flanders, the Poverty Decree (Flemish Government, 2003) stipulates that the participation of people in poverty in social policy making and social work practices should be formally supported by the welfare state, and therefore acknowledges Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs]. These organisations are mainly acknowledged as exercising important leverage in realising the participatory parity of people in poverty (De Bie *et al.*, 2013). The Poverty Decree (2003) requires that APRVs fulfil six diverse criteria to be subsidised, which entail activities that are supported by social practitioners: (1)

enable people in poverty to form an organisation, (2) give a voice to people in poverty, (3) work towards their social emancipation, (4) change social structures, (5) create dialogue and training activities to enhance the solidarity of people in poverty and the non-poor, and (6) continue to seek out people in poverty. There are currently 59 APRVs in Flanders, coordinated by one umbrella organisation, the Network Against Poverty (<http://www.netwerktegenarmoede.be/>). In almost all APRVs, paid practitioners take on the overall responsibility of shaping daily practices. However, exceptionally, volunteers also take on this responsibility due to the choices of the organisation in dealing with their limited resources or their historical background. In this article, 'practitioners' therefore broadly refers to people receive an organisational mandate to take on responsibility in actively shaping organisational policy and practice, be it paid or on a voluntary basis.

APRVs argue that particularly the insider experiences of people in poverty should be revealed, while claiming that the welfare rights and well-being of people in poverty are not guaranteed and achieved in practice. As such, they pursue social justice and social change in close collaboration with people in poverty, with participatory principles and practices being central to their endeavours (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2003). The Network Against Poverty (n.d.) considers participation to be a guiding principle and goal, asserting that "in the fight against poverty, it is important that everybody can participate on an equal basis in society and that society is questioned when this equilibrium is imposed" (own translation). The APRVs therefore provide a highly relevant critical case study for deriving an in-depth understanding of social work practices and the practitioners attempting to pursue participatory parity and social justice while shaping a politics of representation in their real-world contexts. By creating space for critical engagement with the injustices in the economic, cultural, and political realms that are reflected in the individual as well as collective experiences of people in poverty, the APRVs open up opportunities to create 'cultural forums' where different lifeworlds and stories can be exchanged and made public (Boone *et al.*, 2018).

Our research design consists of two clusters: interviews and focus groups. In total, practitioners of 36 of 59¹⁵ of the APRVs took part in the research. All research participants were invited to sign a written informed consent (for the interviews) or to give oral consent (for the focus groups). We requested permission to audio-record the conversations while explaining that all information

¹⁵ And an additional two local collective umbrella organisations (of whom the representatives also have active experience in and links to one or more organisation)

would be treated anonymously and be used only for the purpose of a general analysis and not to reach conclusions about one organisation or respondent in particular. In the following paragraphs, the different clusters of research activities will be discussed in detail.

In the first cluster we conducted qualitative interviews with the objective of obtaining in-depth insight into the overall history, vision of the organisations, and complexities for practitioners in shaping their work. All 59 existing APRVs were invited to demonstrate their interest in a qualitative semi-structured interview through an open call launched by the Network against Poverty. The researcher telephoned the interested APRV, informing them about the research objectives and explaining that it was crucial that the respondents were actively engaged in shaping the daily activities and had knowledge about the genesis, milestones, and complex practices of the organisation. While aiming to interview practitioners from a representative delegation of APRVs in terms of differences in genesis, reach of people in poverty, number of employees, and main focus of activities, some organisations were also contacted directly to complete the research sample. In total, 24 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 32 practitioners from 24 APRVs, since in some interviews, more than one practitioner took part. 27 of the respondents were paid employees, one was a voluntary coordinator with poverty-experience, and four were voluntary practitioners without poverty experience. Five main topics were explored in the interviews: the history of the organisation, perspectives of practitioners on their task in addressing the problem of poverty, the activities they develop, the way in which participation is shaped in the organisation, and the challenges they experience. Whilst the practitioners had varying educational and/or professional backgrounds (mostly in social work, but also in psychology, teaching, etc.), our motivation for interviewing these respondents was their broad knowledge of the organisation and their active engagement in shaping activities in the organisation. In four interviews, practitioners were accompanied by additional respondents to give even more insight in the organisation: two chairpersons of two APRVs, on volunteer with no poverty-experience, and five participants with experience of poverty of two APRVs. The interviews ranged from 1.5 to 3 hours in length and were fully transcribed, as transcription is a very useful process of turning sound recordings into a text prior to subsequent qualitative data analysis of the research material (Howitt, 2010). The research insights were analysed systematically based on a directed approach to qualitative content analysis, which provides an appropriate method for validating and refining a conceptual framework or theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Important common patterns cutting across the diverse interviews were identified (Patton, 2002), and these

were useful for analysing and refining the empirical research insights into how social practitioners act when the who, the how, and the what of social justice are in dispute, therefore enabling the construction of new theoretical insights (Mayring, 2000).

In the second cluster of research activities, focus groups were constructed with the objective of gaining more specific in-depth-knowledge about the complexities in the commitment of practitioners to participatory principles and practices that were expressed during the interviews. These preliminary results were presented and discussed during five focus group meetings because the interaction between group members in focus groups “may produce information different in certain respects from that produced by a separate interview” (Van Hove & Claes, 2011, p. 110). Again, an open call for participation was launched in collaboration with the Network against Poverty, explaining the goal of dialoguing in group about the complexities of shaping participatory activities and goals through APRVs. While also aiming for a diverse and representative sample of APRVs, the focus groups were organised in geographically spread places in an attempt to provide an accessible location. A diversity of organisations and practitioners took part, varying in individual and organisational background, type of activities, size of the organisation, and involvement of people in poverty. Practitioners of 24 organisations¹⁶ took part: 10 were already interviewed in the first cluster, whereas 14 organisations were not represented in the semi-structured interviews. In total, 25 practitioners (and eight participants with experience with poverty who joined a practitioner) participated in the focus groups. The focus groups ranged from 2.5 to 3 hours in length and were transcribed. These data were analysed systematically based on a directed approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As such, a ‘retroductive approach’ informed the research process, which implies a “moving back and forth between narratives and theory, modifying original theoretical statements to fit into the narratives part and using pieces of narratives relevant to the emergent theoretical concepts” (Emerson, 2004, p. 458).

¹⁶ Of which two were of two local collective umbrella organisations.

3.6 Tensions, bottlenecks and complexities in shaping a politics of representation: the ‘how’, the ‘who’, and the ‘what’ of social justice

Our analysis of the empirical research insights allows a further deepening of the theoretical understanding of the question of how a ‘politics of representation’ in which important aspects of justice are determined by citizens themselves is shaped (Fraser, 2005). Although commitment to the participatory parity of people in poverty stands strong as a vision in APRVs, it is a highly contested issue in daily practice. Every practitioner regards parity of participation as a ‘raison d’être’ for their work, while simultaneously questioning the meaning and implementation of this idea in practice. For that reason, we will discuss the most apparent bottlenecks faced by social practitioners in their attempt to engage in such a politics of representation, structuring these by using the three areas of investigation that Fraser uses (2005, 2010) in her general theory, namely, the ‘how’, the ‘who’, and the ‘what’ of social justice.

3.6.1 Shaping the ‘how’ of social justice

Let us begin by giving insight into how practitioners shape democratic processes of collective decision-making, by which reflection on issues of justice in APRVs is stimulated. The need for an ‘accessible place’ where people can encounter each other and form an association was emphasised by many of our respondents. Such a space was often conceived in the course of activities in which the individual concerns of people in poverty could be embraced and where opportunities were created to meet one another without obligation. Examples are the provision of a social grocery or a place where visitors can get individual support and drink a coffee while waiting. This was frequently supplemented with low-threshold activities, such as group gatherings and excursions. According to the respondents, such an accessible place was the foundation, making it possible to bring people together in a group and uncover individual, as well as collective, questions, concerns, and injustices that were being experienced by people in poverty.

The main strategy implies that dealing with those individual as well as collective experiences gradually enables a politics of representation, since this process-oriented work determines to a large extent the substantive thematic work that is conducted in the organisation. This approach is called the ‘dialogue method’, which is framed by the APRVs as a more substantive and process-oriented

participatory practice. The aim of this method is to uncover and reframe the injustices in individual stories and experiences of poverty as socially unjust and therefore deeply problematic in the collective, as well as render them as standpoints in a politics of representation that is coined as an anti-poverty strategy. In this respect, our respondents indicated that in almost all the APRVs, those low-threshold places reached many people (from some dozens to hundreds) and that later these participants were able to make an active contribution to the substantive work and the representation of it in the public sphere. This substantive work mostly had a specific theme at its core (e.g., housing, education, having a worthwhile funeral, food waste) and derived from signals or concerns in the bigger group. It aimed at the creation of collective stories and public standpoints concerning this theme, by supplementing and deepening the questions, concerns, and injustices that practitioners collect or intercept during low threshold activities. These processes often resulted in a dialogue with actors without poverty experience, such as local policy makers or social workers in the outside world, in collaboration with a delegation of people in poverty.

Many respondents, however, considered that shaping such spaces for dialogue often resulted in paradoxical and exclusionary effects and recognised the danger of excluding those who were less articulate or empowered. A practitioner of an organisation working with ethnic minorities explained it as follows:

Eventually you do go further with the people who are the strongest. With us, it mostly had to do with language. For me, it seems very difficult to include somebody in a dialogue, because I want them to tell it, and not me. So I take somebody who is articulate and is able to tell it.
(Practitioner Org.4)

The dialogue approach was also mentioned as a danger to the accessibility of the organisation. Some practitioners emphasised that it resulted in selectivity in reaching certain groups, such as ethnic minorities, people living in deep intergenerational poverty, or people in poverty who lacked communication skills.

Practitioners also asserted that some people in poverty were isolated or might have a sense of pride and therefore were not able or willing to make their private issues public, whether in an organisational or a societal context. Critical questions were also raised about the dialogue process, in which individual and collective injustices were taken into public debate as collective standpoints in close collaboration with people in poverty. A respondent summarised the issue

of dialogue between participants and organisations that might be able to change something as follows:

It is often like a crazy bunch. The formulations, the manners of speaking, the totality of the two different groups, it doesn't match at all. How can it then have influence? (Practitioner Org.5)

For that reason, some organisations established what they called 'good' participatory practices, such as a social grocery, cooking workshops, a theatre play or political demonstrations, as an alternative to the 'dialogue' method. In that sense, these practitioners gave priority to the creation of spaces where people could encounter each other and/or express their capacities by, for example, cooking or making art, without talking directly about their concerns and injustices. Here, the practitioners argued that their role consisted of publicly representing and reframing the issues, capacities, and concerns of people in poverty. Since practitioners make a selection of the concerns and injustices experienced by people in poverty and people in poverty do not represent their own story, these alternative strategies might also require continuing reflection on how such a conception of a politics of representation stands in relation to the principle of participatory parity and power (im)balances between practitioners and people in poverty.

3.6.2 Shaping the 'who' of social justice

Our analysis shows that the dialogue method that is used in the APRVs (the 'how' of social justice in this case) implies that a variety of people in poverty participate in activities with differing aims, but only a minority of them directly participate in activities that are related to a politics of representation. For instance, in almost all APRVs, there are many more people who participate in low-threshold activities where participants can encounter one another or obtain some basic advice on individual questions than in activities with a clearly substantive content aimed at collective dialogue about life situations or in activities aimed at initiating processes of social change. People in poverty often also participate in decision-making channels in the APRVs (e.g., a board meeting, a participation channel), though these always comprise a select number of participants. Such a 'funnel system' raises questions as to whether the perspectives of all people in poverty are equally taken into account in all aspects of the APRVs, particularly those in which their participation is not directly at stake. Some respondents did not necessarily struggle with this selectivity, as

exemplified by an argument of a practitioner while discussing this subject in a focus group:

It's not because the same people always raise their voice or want to, that is only applicable for those three people. (Practitioner in Focus Group 3 - Respondent 1)

Other respondents nevertheless stipulated that it was necessary to involve people from start to finish but emphasised the complexity and constant search to succeed in this mission.

Moreover, although some respondents considered critically what mandate some people might have in relation to the entire group, it appears as though practitioners often had the final say in who was fit for the task of formally representing the interests and voices of other people in poverty as spokespersons. A chairperson with broad knowledge of the daily work in different APRVs articulated this very well:

The first question is who will you choose, what procedure you set in the organisation to select someone from the group, and whether their position is then to represent people in poverty. (...) And you come to the second question: does the person have enough substance? Yes, it is about managing the organisation. It demands some skills and qualities to come to a good and virtuous management. (Chairperson Org.1)

This observation discloses how the extent to which power is distributed between partners in participatory processes remains a tricky issue, since not all people in poverty are equally able, and/or allowed to participate and exert influence. The idea that some people are suitable representatives might convey a sense that some people are the best embodiment of what it means to be poor (Lister, 2000), running the risk of losing the diversity and heterogeneity of experiences of living in poverty. This risk should not be taken lightly, since there seem to be only a handful of so-called 'proper' representatives in the majority of organisations and they are very often the same people. Practitioners attributed this to choices that were made by the representatives themselves but also to their own choices, choosing people who articulate it well, have good communication skills, can stay calm and collected, etc.

However, there seem to be no easy solutions for dealing with this issue, which is exemplified by how a practitioner expressed the struggle over deciding who were suitable spokespersons:

I struggle with ways of dealing with the mandate people are given. You shape a process with a number of people, about ten, and then you represent their standpoints in the wider society with two people who defend a position on behalf of all the other people in poverty. I struggle with it... I don't know how you should do it otherwise, but I would like to see it differently. (Practitioner Org.7)

Other practitioners explicitly objected to such a funnel system, warning that such an interpretation of participation and representation created a sort of 'window-dressing participation' (Lister, 2002) and arguing that all people in poverty should be able to participate on a par but obviously lack the power to do so. Practitioners nevertheless remain somewhat puzzled about the rather invisible power relations between practitioners and people in poverty in the APRVs. Some respondents reflected on how the pace and rules for participation were often set by practitioners where the participation of people in people consists of "tagging along to meetings", in which they "can't follow the discussion" and "just sit around the table". One practitioner summarizes how this conflicts with the ability to fully participate:

If the purpose is to raise the voice of people in poverty and if that is how this principle is implemented, that is fooling yourself. (Practitioner Org.5)

These practitioners emphasised that participation should *permeate* the entire organisation on every level, in every participatory principle and practice. In that case, however, some practitioners experienced this expectation as a weight on their shoulders since they should be in touch with everyone:

When you have to engage in every question or in every field of interest from the group, then it doesn't work. You still have the collective, which is chaotic to some extent. (Practitioner Org.18)

Our respondents mainly stressed that complexities would result if everybody could have their say in the organisation. They also stressed that they were supposed to work continuously to seek new alliances with people in poverty who had not yet joined the organisation, which required them, for example, to make home visits.

3.6.3 Shaping the 'what' of social justice

Since a central focus in the work of Fraser is on first-order questions about 'what' counts as a just ordering of social relations within society, insight is also needed into existing ideas about social justice and parity of participation and the way these ideas influence concrete practice. Interestingly, APRVs have a double focus: they simultaneously strive towards the personal growth and empowerment of people in poverty while educating and uniting them and are mandated to work on changing social structures. Since parity of participation is not only a goal but also a premise in the APRVs, empowerment is often stated to be necessary to be able to participate in processes aimed at achieving structural goals.

Deriving from this finding, however, a pertinent question might be whether oppressive and socially unjust relationships that are firmly rooted in social inequalities in society remain out of the picture when the responsibility for fighting poverty is projected onto people in poverty, both individually and collectively. In this regard, Fraser (1995, 2005) has stated that strategies to fight injustices can be formed on two distinct levels: 'affirmative strategies' can be seen as purely compensating for the outcomes of injustices, whereas 'transformative strategies' aim to change and restructure the very core of the way our society is organised.

Although Fraser (1995) emphasises that only a restructuring of the societal order will suffice to achieve the goal of social justice and thus parity of participation, practitioners indicate that it is precisely the premise of participation of people in poverty that stands in sharp contrast with this transformative goal in the APRVs. This tension is noticeable when practitioners explain that many people in poverty primarily need support and to meet fellow sufferers and do not feel the need to engage in deliberative processes, theme groups and public actions to facilitate structural change. In this case, practitioners feel stuck between providing participatory parity and working towards structural change.

On some occasions this leads to cutting the participatory dialogue loose from structural aims in the organisation, implying that practitioners make one-sided decisions about what strategies are used and what sort of structural change is aimed for:

So I understand that it was brought together, stating that structural change will happen because people in poverty raise their voice. That is correct, it can be like that, but imagine that they wait with structural

changes until people in poverty raise their voice, then we are five to eight decades later. It has nothing to do with it, it really has nothing to do with it. We [practitioners in the APRVs] can now already say what needs to change. (Practitioner Org.5)

On other occasions, it leads to giving priority to the premise of parity of participation, possibly running the danger of investing in rather affirmative strategies in dealing with the problem of poverty “aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). This is, for instance, apparent in the struggle of practitioners to address the growing number of requests for individual help, in which practitioners express that they can’t “leave people in the cold” although it is not their core task.

A growing part of the work in some APRVs consists of relieving individual needs of people, though practitioners express the conviction that doing so affirms the idea in society that the regular services do not have to change their mode of work since the APRVs can function as a safety net. The societal context also influences the scepticism of practitioners about social change, bringing a similar complexity to the question of whether APRVs should not rather invest in integrating people into society. Such inevitable ambiguity was beautifully articulated by a practitioner:

Where there used to be a political discourse that might want to raise the minimum wage, nowadays I see that we should already be happy if we can keep what we have... I struggle with it, because on the one hand it might be better to prepare our people for the society in which they live. Since society is much more individualistic and selfish, shouldn't we strengthen our people in such manner? We do that, for instance, by investing in group purchases (so it costs a little bit less for individuals). On the other hand, if we hadn't resisted and combatted these societal logics all those years, then it might now be much worse. (Practitioner Org.11)

3.7 Concluding reflections

As we have argued and illustrated, social work can provide “a mode for discursive struggle” (Dean, 2004, p. 200) for different social justice claims and concerns, to the extent to which there can be resistance to social injustice as a

solid basis for the substantive negotiation of collective concerns for recognition, redistribution, and representation (Boone *et al.*, 2018). In this commitment, parity of participation is not only a goal but also a basic premise in participatory social work processes (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009).

Nevertheless, in this article, we have shed light on the complexities of the 'how', the 'who', and the 'what' of social justice that arise in daily practice while engaging in such a participatory politics of representation. In relation to the 'how' of social justice, the dominant dialogue method of shaping a politics of representation entails complexity and exclusionary effects in practice. Practitioners in the APRVs acknowledge that this method enhances hierarchical mechanisms that exclude the most powerless, yet in their attempt to create alternative and indirect forms of representation, the individual and collective injustices experienced by people in poverty are sometimes interpreted, selected, and reframed for them rather than with them. According to Lister (2002), not addressing this powerlessness creates the danger of enhancing rather than removing differences in power to influence the debate around poverty. In relation to shaping the 'who' of social justice, practitioners in APRVs seem to question the feasibility of participatory parity for all people in poverty in formal decision-making or consultative bodies and organise this politics of representation in a way that often results in a selection of who is able to participate. This hierarchy often remains invisible, yet might allow only a selective and privileged delegation of representatives to become the embodiment of what it implies to be living in poverty. Nevertheless, in attempting to overcome such hierarchies by making sure that everyone's voice is influential in APRVs, practitioners sometimes get lost in the sheer complexity of the task. In relation to the 'what' of social justice, the double focus of APRVs on empowering people in poverty and enhancing structural change leads in practice to tensions between affirmative and transformative strategies. The premise of parity of participation can be in sharp contrast with the quest for structural change, leading to the danger of decoupling the participation of people in poverty in transformative strategies.

In that sense, nonetheless, our research shows that the struggles of social work for participatory parity may perpetuate the very hierarchies, exclusions, and injustices that they attempt to overcome. It is therefore vital to keep in mind that social work itself is also a producer and transmitter of power struggles that are associated with the different domains of social (in)justice (Webb, 2010). Our findings suggest that even in practices that situate the principle of parity of participation at the core of their fight for social justice, a vigorous debate should be held about power asymmetries and social inequalities while aiming to create

such a politics of representation (Davies *et al.*, 2014; Phillips, 2004; Webb, 2010). It is therefore necessary to be constantly aware that the choices made by organisations and practitioners have implications, and continuous efforts should be made to reflect openly on their assumptions and choices. Whatever the chosen pathways are, these will have downsides and will need constant re-evaluation. Perhaps practitioners should be aware that they will never be able to resolve or escape inherent tensions and complexities in their attempts to work on a par with people in poverty (Roose, Roets, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2012). They can only make continuous efforts to inform the public debate about the socially unjust nature of poverty and to frame poverty as a violation of human rights. Garrett (2010) provides an insightful criticism, arguing that it is tricky to “divert attention from the role of the powerful, of the misrecognizers (...) focusing on the consequences of suffering misrecognition rather than on the more fundamental question of what it means to commit it” (p. 1525). As such, a politics of representation might evolve as a form of identity politics, leaving the agenda to be set by people whose power has been so much taken for granted that they “threaten to reinforce the very patterns of domination they otherwise claim to challenge” (Phillips, 2004, p. 36-37). It might therefore make sense to imagine social practitioners as policy actors who start from a humble position rather than heroes who speak truth to power in the case of injustice and shape a politics of representation. While maintaining a politics of hope, social practitioners might “engage in understanding how different communities and interests understand a given social problem and, as such, the role of a policy activist in the political sphere is more about acting as an interpreter and mediator of competing worldviews” (Marston & McDonald, 2012, p. 1029).

3.8 References

- Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness: Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.
- Beresford, P. (2002). Participation and social policy: Transformation, liberation or regulation? In R. Sykes, C. Bochel, & N. Ellison (Eds.), *Social policy review 14: developments and debates 2001–2002* (pp. 265–87). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (2004). Service users and practitioners reunited. The key component for social work reform. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(1), 53–68.

- Beresford, P. (2010), Public partnerships, governance and user involvement: A service user perspective. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34, 495–502.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Claeys, A., & Vanhee, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Armoede en participatie*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Cornwall, A., & Brock, K. (2005). What do buzzwords do for development policy? A critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(7), 1043–1060.
- Davies, K., Gray, M., & Webb, S. (2014). Putting the parity into service-user participation. An integrated model of social justice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 119–127.
- Dean, H. (Ed.). (2004). *The ethics of welfare: Human rights, dependency and responsibility*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Dean, H. (2013). The translation of needs into rights: Reconceptualising social citizenship as a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(S1), 32–49.
- De Bie, M., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2013). Participatie en armoedebestrijding: Een democratisch vraagstuk. In J. Mostinckx, F. Deven, & P. Dauwe (Eds.), *Welzijn en zorg in Vlaanderen. Wegwijzer voor de sociale sector* (pp. 467–482). Mechelen, Belgium: Wolters Kluwen.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Emerson, R. (2004). Working with key incidents. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 457–72). London: Sage.
- Flemish Government (2003). *Decreet betreffende de armoedebestrijding*. Retrieved from

http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=2003032143&table_name=wet

Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition. Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68–93.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus. Critical reflections on the “postsocialist” condition*. London: Routledge

Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.

Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.

Fraser, N. (2008). Abnormal justice. *Critical Inquiry*, 34(3), 393–422.

Fraser, N. (2010). Injustice at intersecting scales. On ‘social exclusion’ and the ‘global poor’. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 13(3), 363–371.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Garrett, P. M. (2002). Social work and the just society. Diversity, difference and the sequestration of poverty. *Journal of Social Work*, 2(2), 187–210.

Garrett, P. M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(5), 1517–1533.

Grunwald, K., & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of “lifeworld orientation” for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23(2), 131–46.

Howitt, D. (2010). *Introduction to qualitative methods in psychology*. Harlow: Pearson.

Hsieh, H.F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.

International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/> on 8th of April, 2015.

- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2005). Listening to 'life knowledge': A new research direction in poverty studies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 99–106.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Lister, R. (2002). A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision making that affects their lives. *Social Policy & Society*, 1(1), 37–46.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social practitioners as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewArticle/1089/2385>
- Mehta, L. (2008). Over the rainbow: The politics of researching citizenship and marginality. *Action Research*, 6(2), 233–253.
- Network against Poverty. (n.d.). *Gewoon mens mogen zijn!* Retrieved from <http://netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Visietekst-Vlaams-Netwerk.pdf>.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Phillips, A. (2004). Identity politics: Have we now had enough? In J. Andersen and B. Sim (Eds.), *The Politics of Inclusion and Empowerment: Gender, Class and Citizenship* (pp. 36–48). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Postle, K., & Beresford, P. (2007). Capacity building and the reconception of political participation. A role for social care practitioners? *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), 143–158.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy and Administration*, 46(7), 807–822.

- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social Work: In search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592–1607.
- Suijs, S. (2012). *Ervaring aan de grens: Hedendaagse armoedebestrijding in Vlaanderen* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/357828/1/proefschriftpStijnpSuijs.pdf>
- Van Hove, G., & Claes, L. (2011). *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Webb, S. A. (2010). (Re)assembling the left. The politics of redistribution and recognition in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2364–2379.

CHAPTER 4

Enabling the recognition of people in
poverty through social work practice:
From being on a par to participating
on a par

ABSTRACT

In its engagement towards anti-poverty-strategies, social work has become strongly embedded in a politics of recognition and respect. Nevertheless, this raises critical considerations in regard to how such a politics connects to the material, structural and political components of poverty. We build on an intensive qualitative study in five Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice (Belgium), to reveal how practitioners attempt to provide this connection. Findings from this research show that the recognition and empowerment of people in poverty is not only enabled through niches in which participants are addressed on their strengths in daily practice, but also through the conception of the transformative potential of such niches in which people in poverty are positioned as indispensable active partners in the fight against injustices. This article highlights the challenges of denouncing the socio-economic and political subordination of people in poverty without defining people in poverty by their status; and concludes that reflection on differences that subordinate people in poverty must remain at the heart of social work practice, but should be framed as a communicative base to create solidarity for and indignation about the unjust nature of the daily struggles people in poverty have to endure.

Based on Boone, K., Roets, G. & Roose, R. (submitted). Enabling the recognition of people in poverty through social work practice. From being on a par to participating on a par. *European Journal of Social Work*.

4.1 Introduction

Social work scholars have observed that relational, symbolic and cultural components of poverty have become more prominent in Western European welfare states' anti-poverty policy making since the 1980s (Fraser, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008; Garrett, 2010; Gupta, Blumhardt, & ATD Fourth World, 2017; Houston, 2016; Lister, 2002, 2004, 2013; Thompson, 2006; Webb, 2010). With regard to this topic, social work researchers, policy makers and practitioners have argued that people in poverty continue to be seen as inferior or as an 'other' in society (Beresford & Croft, 1995; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Lister, 2004) through processes "of differentiation and demarcation by which social distance is established and maintained" (Lister, 2013, p. 113). As the mandate of social work involves the negotiation between individual aspirations and private issues and the public domain of the welfare state (Boone, Roets, & Roose, 2018a; Lorenz, 2016, 2017), it is thus no surprise that in the last decades the profession has become strongly embedded in a 'politics of recognition and respect' (Davies, Gray, & Webb, 2014; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Lister, 2002, 2004, 2013; Marthinsen & Skjefstad, 2011; Roets *et al.*, 2012), since this entails a possible means of combatting such 'othering' (Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Lister, 2002) and stimulating social justice for all (Fraser, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008). In this commitment, social work increasingly focused on tackling the consequences of these symbolic and cultural injustices experienced by people in poverty, such as feelings of shame, humiliation, and worthlessness due to stigmatisation. Here, social work has become more and more invested in challenging people's powerlessness, lack of opportunities to express their voice and the denial of their full-fledged citizenship (Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Lister, 2002, 2004, 2013).

However, some authors have also questioned the relational, symbolic and cultural discourse of social work practice—in particular, the intersection between a politics of recognition and respect and the material, structural and political components of poverty (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Davies *et al.*, 2014; Dean, 2015; Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; O'Brien, 2011; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Webb, 2010). For example, in a recent article in the *European Journal of Social Work*, Gupta, Blumhardt and ATD Fourth World (2017) argue that "treating people with respect is a core social work value. However, it must be linked to wider social and political contexts and underpinned by a fundamental belief in equality and human rights" (p. 11). In this empirical research article, we

therefore engage with the question of how social work practitioners can actively try to shape practices that connect recognition and respect for people in poverty with the socio-economic and political dimensions of poverty.

4.2 Social work practices as enabling niches for the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty

Working with people in poverty has been integral to social work since its genesis. As a profession, social work situates its own role in alleviating poverty and in stimulating social change and empowering people, while emphasising the promotion and upholding of human rights and social justice, respect for diversity, and the inherent worth and dignity of human beings (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). Consequently, social work's engagement in a politics of recognition and respect is intelligible since - notwithstanding the fact that people in poverty are granted a formal citizenship – they are often denied human dignity and proper recognition in social interactions. This means that people in poverty often experience an inferior citizenship, with their human dignity and equal worth disregarded in everyday social interactions (Dean, 2015; Garrett, 2010; Houston, 2016; Lister, 2004). Since people in poverty are entitled to “having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation, being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 77), the role of social work in the promotion and enablement of the dignity, equal worth, agency and recognition of people in poverty is thus vital (Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017).

In this commitment, the recognition of the person's strengths, abilities, participation and resilience in the rebuilding of their lives is regarded as essential (Garrett, 2016; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Roose, Roets, & Schiettecat, 2012). For this reason, some authors argue for social work to create ‘enabling niches’ that serve as “the environmental analogue of individual strengths” (Ryke, Strydom, & Botha, 2006, p. 1940) to offer participatory opportunities for people in poverty to realise their strengths (Rapp & Goscha, 2012; Ryke *et al.*, 2006; Sullivan, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Van Regenmortel, 2011). Ryke *et al.* (2006) argue that this idea often finds expression in social work through other concepts such as ‘personal and social empowerment’ or the creation of ‘nurturing environments’. However, this paper uses the term ‘enabling niche’, because this term is frequently used by academics and practitioners in

Flanders to denote the role of social work in poverty alleviation (Driessens & Van Regenmortel, 2006; Van Regenmortel, 2002, 2009, 2011).

The idea of enabling niches suggests that social work should create social spaces that offer “safe havens” to people in poverty and help them to grow and “make connections with less or un-known niches and environments” (Van Regenmortel, 2011, p. 17; authors’ translation). Based on the definition outlined by Taylor (1997), such niches imply settings that define people in poverty as individuals with their own aspirations and characteristics rather than by their social status. Enabling niches denote supportive environments with adequate resources that provide opportunities to develop skills and “meaningful interactions with others who bring different perspectives and expand one’s social world” (Sullivan, 1997, p. 193). Also important in the idea of such niches is the absence of stigmatisation and that people in poverty feel recognised, appreciated, and have opportunities for partnership and participation (Driessens & Van Regenmortel, 2006; Rapp & Goscha, 2012; Ryke *et al.*, 2006; Sullivan, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Van Regenmortel, 2002, 2009, 2011).

4.3 The (de-)coupling of recognition from a structural analysis

Unlike other marginalised groups or movements that assert difference as part of their identity—for example, lesbian, gay, transsexual and bisexual people, women, or people with disabilities — “it is not possible for a person to take pride in their poverty” (Dean, 2015, p. 144). As such, the differences of people in poverty should not be promoted, as their differences stem from structural lack of material and social resources that are needed to live a dignified life. Instead, their search for recognition is “on their common humanity and citizenship and the equal worth that flows from that. This underpins what is also a struggle for recognition of agency and political voice” (Lister, 2004, p. 188).

In this regard, the tripartite theory of Nancy Fraser (1997, 2000, 2005, 2008) – in which the interplay of the economic, cultural and political dimensions is emphasised in order to achieve a socially just society in which all can participate as *pars* in social life – inspired a lot of social work scholars to embrace the complex and interwoven nature of working with people in deprived situations (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Boone, Roets, & Roose, 2018b; Davies *et al.*, 2014; Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; McLaughlin, 2014; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Webb, 2010). From a commitment to “pursue both individual justice

and social justice, with and on behalf of people whose equal worth has been impugned in some way” (Poulter, n.d., p. 2), a strong argument is made for social work practices to engage in a politics of recognition and respect in which the promotion of the human and equal worth of people in poverty stands central. As such, social work should be engaged in the denouncing of practices and mechanisms that distinguish people in poverty as ‘second class citizens’ (Lister, 2004). However these scholars also argue that practitioners and policy makers should connect a politics of recognition and respect to the socio-economic and political circumstances and constraints of people in poverty (Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b; Davies *et al.*, 2014; Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; McLaughlin, 2014; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Webb, 2010).

Building on the ideas of Fraser (1997, 2000), this calls into question the recent prominence of ‘identity politics’ in social policy and social work practice, since this generates practices that focus on realising the individual aspirations of people in poverty rather than on improving their collective socio-economic status (Garrett, 2010; Webb, 2010). Influenced by such a discourse, policy makers and practitioners often view empowerment-oriented practices as strategies to integrate people in poverty into society by helping them take control over their situation and environment (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Garrett, 2016; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Singh & Cowden, 2015). This highlights factors for consideration in the creation of strengths-based and empowering settings, because such enabling niches “closely correspond to concepts such as normalisation and community integration. Each of these concepts suggests that marginalised people would be ‘better off’ to the degree to which they can be woven into the fabric of normal everyday life” (Rapp & Goscha, 2012, p. 38). In that sense, it creates the danger of decoupling the recognition of the human dignity and inherent capabilities of people in poverty from the economic and structural challenges of poverty (Davies, Webb, & Gray, 2014; Fraser, 1997, 2008, 2000, 2005; Garrett, 2016; Lister, 2004, 2013; Thompson, 2006; Webb, 2010).

Walsh (in Garrett, 2016) argues that “it is not enough to bolster the resilience of at-risk children and families so that they can ‘beat the odds’; we must also strive to change the odds against them” (p. 1917). In this vein, enabling niches should be spaces that position principles of respect, human rights, equality and fairness at the core of daily practice in working with people in poverty. At the same time, these principles should be linked to wider socio-economic and political factors to effect social justice (Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017). This article therefore draws on qualitative research in five Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs] to contribute to the question how practitioners

can actively create enabling niches while making the connection with transformative and structural components.

4.4 Methodology

Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs] have – by command of the Flemish Poverty Decree (2003) – the mission to 1) continuously seek out new people in poverty, 2) enable people in poverty to unite, 3) give voice to people in poverty, 4) work towards their social emancipation, 5) change social structures, and 6) create dialogue and training activities to enhance the solidarity of people in poverty and the non-poor. Spread across Flanders and Brussels, 59 APRVs aim to fulfil societal change and the participatory parity of people in poverty by collaborating with people in poverty (Network against Poverty, n.d.). To achieve this mission, one or more practitioners collaborate with people in poverty as well as with volunteers with no experience of poverty.

During the period of mid 2015 until mid-2017 the first author of this article conducted an intensive research study in five APRVs (see chapter 1). These were selected for this research to highlight strategies used by practitioners to create enabling niches while connecting their practice with social, political and economic issues. This selection was based on some elements: 1) All APRVs were from a different region and some were located in a more rural and others in a urban context; 2) they ranged from 0,5 paid employees to 5 employees, 3) some generated from a helping or charitable core, while others from a more political vision, 4) some had a large group of participants, while others had a small group.

Eighty participatory observations of group activities took place in the first phase of this study. These ranged from low-threshold meeting activities, to substantial group work, to activities aimed to influence public debate. Before each observation, the researcher informed study participants about the research aims and role of the researcher. Most activities observed were two or three hours in duration. Notetaking during observation included factual field notes and an interpretation section in which the researcher recorded thoughts in relation to the research focus (Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011). As such the participant observation provided an initial full picture about the work of practitioners in APRVs, and also provided “a way of ensuring the researcher is able to ask the right questions” (Van Hove & Claes, 2011, p. 135) in the following phase of the research.

In the second phase of this study, semi-structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) were conducted to provide deeper insight into practitioners' strategies to support recognition of people in poverty while connecting their practice with transformative and structural factors. In total, 25 group and individual interviews took place with APRVs practitioners and participants. Twelve group interviews took place: ten with APRVs participants (total of 34 respondents) and two with volunteers (total of nine respondents). In addition, thirteen one-on-one interviews were conducted with practitioners. Interviews ranged from one to two hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed (Howitt, 2010).

Next, three focus groups (Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011) were organised to discuss findings with participants and practitioners of other APRVs. One focus group took place with people in poverty (n=6 of three organisations) and two with practitioners (n=13 of thirteen organisations).

All data was analysed through a qualitative content analysis, so the core themes in the data could be identified (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A 'retroductive approach' guided the research process, in which themes stemming from relevant literature and previous research on strengths-based social work, empowerment and recognition interplayed with our empirical fieldwork and data (Downward & Mearman, 2007; Emerson, 2004).

In the next paragraphs we will respectively discuss how practitioners in APRVs create enabling niches in which people in poverty get due recognition, how practitioners connect such niche with transformative aims, and what complexities arise in attempting to provide this connection.

4.5 Findings

Participants in this study—practitioners, people in poverty and volunteers—referred to APRVs as “distinct spaces” in which people in poverty “can be human again”, “belong somewhere”, “can be who they truly are”, “have the right to be accounted for”, and “are of equal worth”. For this reason, APRVs offer an interesting case study to examine strategies used by social work practitioners to create niches that support dignity, recognition, equal worth and agency of people in poverty while promoting social change. In what follows, we will therefore first discuss how practitioners create niches in daily practice, and in a second section will discuss how this relates to the aim of societal change.

4.5.1 Providing low threshold places

The idea of the creation of a 'low-threshold place' or a 'safe haven' is considered to be a solid basis for the work of APRVs. Here, a main quality is that there are not textbooks or guidelines on how people in poverty should act when they come into the organization, since a lot of emphasis is put upon giving opportunities to people "to be who they truly are". This objective is tied to social practitioners' goal to provide space to facilitate growth for all participants in APRVs. For example, a lot of respondents described that people in poverty often attended APRVs for weeks, months, or years before becoming active participants. In one focus group discussion, a practitioner explained the 'flexibility' this requires of practitioners:

We often stimulate people in poverty to work in groups, but this implies that people first have to find the strength to do so and be able to tell their story, that they also have the mental space to do so... So, when people suddenly have a setback or if they experience problems in their personal life, then I do the opposite, and I give them the space to retreat from the group and give attention to the individual. (Focus group practitioners 2, R6)

'Un-conditionality' is another core premise in the provision of such low threshold spaces for people in poverty. Findings from this research reveal that people in poverty have the sense that they can make mistakes, don't always have to be perfect and can be called upon their specific behavior but are never excluded as a person. A fragment of an observation exemplifies this:

A participant started lashing out at all of the members of the group without any noticeable particular reason. Here the practitioners firmly reacted that 'such communication could and would not be tolerated' while arguing that the behaviour of that person in the circumstances was uncalled for. The person left with slamming doors, but not before the practitioners repeatedly said: 'know that you are always welcome here, but that we should discuss what happened just now'.

In the same week they had a follow-up conversation in which the practitioner emphasised the same message. In a next group meeting the person explained her behaviour to some extent and apologised and everything went on as if nothing had happened. (Observation Org.3)

This un-conditionality is often placed in opposition with existing social services and the broader societal discourse in which specific behaviour, attitudes and activities of people in poverty are expected. In effectuating such un-conditionality in APRVs, the importance of practitioners is stressed. This is explained by the following participant:

The practitioner did not ask 'do you have problems; do you want to talk?' He didn't push me to reflect on my feelings, I could just be there, and I wasn't obliged to talk. In other experiences I felt like services and social workers are interested if you have problems, but if everything goes well they don't bother to get in touch with you. (Group interview Org.1g, R2)

Many participants described their APRV and the people in this APRV (practitioners, other participants, volunteers) as feeling like 'family'. Consistent with un-conditionality, this implies the openness to discuss issues, fight, and to make up. Here some practitioners are very strict and others loose, but they are always warm, and although poverty and the problems of people are very central in the work of APRVs, there is also a lot of laughter and banter in the daily interactions.

4.5.2 Stimulating a sense of equal worth

One focus of social work practitioners involved in APRVs is creating low threshold, unconditional and amical spaces. However, the observation phase of this research revealed that practitioners involved in APRVs also more directly facilitate feelings of equal worth among people in poverty through their interactions with APRV-participants. Practitioners do this with different, often complementary strategies. For example, many people in poverty emphasise that they do "not want to be treated as victims". One expert-by-experience said:

I hate it when social workers treat me too cautiously. I want them to be honest, that they don't beat around the bush. They often patronise us, often seem afraid to say something. But we want to be treated as normal individuals, you can say what you want as long as you say it respectfully. (Interview Org.1c)

Such a vision is reflected in the actions of practitioners in APRVs, as the researcher often witnessed very open discussions in which the practitioners shared their own opinions on substantive matters and occasionally expressed discontent to specific participants about something that happened. Also practitioners often stress that they tend to serve as a "mirror", giving people in

poverty advice on how to deal with certain situations, for instance in how to communicate with other social workers. What also became clear through our observations is that the distinction between practitioners, volunteers and participants is often only made in the problems they encounter, rather than in their status or in their capabilities. For instance, practitioners or volunteers often bring in personal stories about their personal life or experiences, or position themselves as 'being part of the group' rather than as a distinct member with a different position.

For instance, one of the group gatherings we observed concerning the difficulty of raising children when you don't have legal citizenship, always started with introducing all the group members to one another by stating your name, how many children you have and their name, where they go to school. Practitioners always took part in this round. (Observation Org.2)

In the same vein, practitioners, volunteers and participants collaborated on activities to support day-to-day operations of their APRVs, such as cleaning up after meals or driving others to activities.

On the other hand, some practitioners also very consciously made the choice of not treating everybody equal and used 'positive discrimination' to enhance the self-worth of participants in their APRVs. Observation and the following interviews revealed that practitioners create participation possibilities in which "everybody's talents can come to play while having special attention for the most vulnerable". For example, practitioners might encourage certain quiet participants to engage in group meetings, or take some people under their wings and let others fly.

For instance, in a particular group-meeting, the practitioner – who normally always just lets the meeting run its course - paused when two participants came in late and shuffled chairs next to him so they could sit. While talking about this in the interview, he said that this was motivated because those people had not been to the organisation for a long time and he knew that they needed a sense of being safe. (Observation Org.5)

In interviews, practitioners argued for positive discrimination towards people in poverty:

You do injustice when you make individuals do something they are not equipped for, when you treat them as equal. It is a pitfall because equal and equal worth is not the same. All people are very different and very unequal, but fundamentally have an equal worth. (...) It is not because a person cannot take charge, but can execute tasks perfectly, that it is less important. Practitioners have to make sure that the puzzle fits, that everyone can take on something. (Focus Group practitioners 1, R2)

This highlights that practitioners in APRVs use participatory opportunities for people in poverty to foster feelings of belonging and equal worth. In turn, this might empower participants and helps them connect with society outside their APRV.

4.6 Connecting enabling niches to the aim of societal change

The theoretical framework of this research is that engagement of social work in politics of recognition and respect should take into account socio-political and economic conditions and promote social justice. The question thus evidently arises how the idea of such enabling niches and the investment in participation relates to more socio-political and transformative goals of the APRVs. The next section therefore discusses strategies used by APRVs and their practitioners to provide this connection. In addition, the discussion highlights obstacles that practitioners face in making this connection.

4.6.1 Creating transformative enabling niches

This research has demonstrated that practitioners, participants and volunteers see APRVs as unique spaces that are distinct from a lot of the more mainstream helping and supporting services. During the interviews it was frequently addressed that APRVs enable “to work differently with people in poverty” and that practitioners can “have another relationship with people in poverty” that is not characterised by dynamics of power and dependence. We already exemplified that this relates to practitioners who create unconditional spaces and stimulate the sense of equal worth of people in poverty through the acknowledgement of their strengths and participation. However, this distinctiveness is also often inherently connected to a more structural component, as we will outline below.

Since APRVs aim to stimulate change towards more participatory parity and a more just society, a dominant vision in the work of practitioners is that their structural mission should depart from where “people are at”, and practice should proceed from the experiences of people in poverty. Building on this premise, a lot of practitioners emphasised that they actively take on ‘a stance of solidarity’ for the unjust situations of people in poverty, enabling the connection of individual growth with transformative goals. Practitioners demonstrated their solidarity with people in poverty in their day-to-day work. For example, findings of this research highlighted practitioners’ views on the ‘togetherness of not knowing’. Somewhat different than a lot of social work practices in which the practitioner is conceived as the expert, our observations show that practitioners in APRVs frequently express their own insecurity or ignorance on how to proceed in order to change individual or collective situations, while for instance at the same time suggesting that “maybe we should think about it collectively”. One practitioner explained the strengths of such a stance as follows:

The organisation functions as a space for practitioners to be vulnerable, which is not simple. Not acting like you know everything because you don't. You don't know together, the worth is that you are powerless together. (Interview Org.2b)

In this regard, respondents quite frequently called APRVs “miniature societies”, as these are believed to reflect an alternative bond between practitioners, volunteers and people in poverty which is often lacking in society. Through the embracement of the collaboration between people in poverty, practitioners and volunteers, respondents state that a mutual understanding in the complexity of each other’s life worlds and solidarity for the situation of people in poverty is enabled. Demonstrations of this solidarity concretely shine through in the actions and verbalisations of practitioners, in which an important premise is to “fit practice on the basis of understanding the living conditions of the people you work with”. This implies that practitioners should consider, for example, that APRVs participants might not have eaten before meetings, might not be able to attend group sessions because of an appointment with their lawyer, and might attend meetings intermittently or require frequent reminders because of their preoccupation with their daily survival. Observations for this research highlighted that solidarity with people in poverty thus demands flexibility of practitioners, for instance by changing the timing of meetings, making repeated efforts to contact no-show participants, by sensitising volunteers, other practitioners and participants to understand participants’ circumstances, and by facilitating frank and judgement-free discussions in group meetings.

In addition, practitioners demonstrated solidarity with people in poverty through explicit acknowledgement of APRV-participants as “victims of the system”. Practitioners argued that people in poverty experience problems that are terrible and unjust, and that practitioners should “stand by people” and work with participants to address these injustices. For example, practitioners demonstrated solidarity with people in poverty by sitting or standing next to APRVs participants during discussions with policy makers or other social workers. Also practitioners showed solidarity through ‘verbalising’ shared goals:

In everything we do, the experiences of people in poverty are fundamental, and they have the final say, but we talk, and we act together with them. It is far more powerful to step in the limelight as ‘us’ than when you talk about people in poverty. (...) ‘Us’ in our organisation implies what we collaboratively want to fight against poverty and change society. ‘Us’ is actually the word of people in poverty together with that of people who are not living in poverty, it encloses this collaborate goal. (Interview Org.1a)

By bringing this solidarity into the public debate through different strategies, practitioners, volunteers and participants expressed their hope that this might attune society to the daily injustices experienced by people in poverty. One volunteer without experience of poverty said:

I hope it’s contagious ... Our organisation does not have the monopoly of authenticity, but it is surely a source of humanity that can keep the rest of society awake. That’s why the poorest are often pushed to the side, because they confront people with humanity. (Group interview Org.1e, R3)

Such a quote exemplifies how practitioners, volunteers and people in poverty often use words including “hope”, “dreams”, “beliefs”, and “aspirations” while talking about societal change. On the one hand, their choice of words reflects uncertainty about the broader effects of daily practices in APRVs. On the other hand, this also reveals that recognition and empowerment of people in poverty is not only aspired through enabling niches that give chances to people in poverty and address their strengths, but also through the conception of the transformative potential of such niches in which people in poverty are indispensable active partners in the fight against injustices. The chairperson of one APRV capsulated this potential of ‘transformative enabling niches’ as follows:

Creating the feeling with deprived people that 'we experience the same difficulties, we have the right to fight and believe in that fight'. And that empowers immensely. One and one is three... As practitioners, creating a feeling of togetherness and as such believing and fighting for equal rights. (Interview Org.2c)

4.6.2 Critical considerations in making this connection

APRVs truly appear to provide niches in which it does not matter how much resources you have or what your societal status is to get due recognition. In spite — or perhaps just because — of APRVs' distinctiveness, the findings in this study still suggest that it is important for practitioners to not have blinders on for how the creation of such "miniature societies" relates to broader societal issues and to the day-to-day reality of participants.

First, findings from this research reveal that practitioners in APRVs demonstrate sensitivity to the hurt feelings, difficult living situations, disillusionment and experiences of people in poverty. However, our research also revealed that sometimes practitioners run the risk of becoming overconfident if they are not constantly conscious about such issues in daily practice. Some segments from an interview with a practitioner exemplify this:

The practitioner at the beginning of the interview started by saying: 'we do not have a problem with participation... we make sure that everybody can participate, and everybody consequently does, so it is not an issue...'

After an hour in the interview she suddenly reflected on what she said previously: 'maybe I am wrong, because yesterday a colleague of mine informed me that [participant X] came to her and said she did not dare to speak her mind in the meeting with me, because she was scared that I would not agree. And I was genuinely surprised'. (Interview Org.1a)

This thus reveals that creating a niche in which practitioners regard and allow people to 'be on a par', does not necessarily imply that people feel recognized as being of equal worth and consequently participate on a par. In one focus group discussion, a participant explained:

It appears to be easy: 'come to the organisation, and you can be whoever you want to be'... but it sometimes takes so long until you dare to show a little bit of who you are or to know what you want, because for

so long you have been the person society expects you to be. (Focus group people in poverty, R6)

Such an example highlights the constant need for practitioners in APRVs to reflect on what is actually happening in their daily practice, not on what they assume is happening. As such – and despite all good intentions of ensuring that people are on a par – the impact that the societal ‘impairity of participation’ of people in poverty has on practice should not be underestimated. In this regard, it is important to stress that APRVs are considered by people in poverty as a “breath of fresh air” since they are not confronted with being different and with their exclusion, as they “have found a context in which it doesn’t matter what my position is in society”. Determined to not treat people in poverty as different, our findings also suggest that some practitioners therefore seem *reluctant* in addressing the socio-economic and political impairment of people in poverty in practice, or make the inward movement of framing their own practice as being particularly important for giving people in poverty the sense of equal worth or of being on a par.

For example, APRVs are often described as unique because of the opportunities they offer people in poverty to participate in the public debate over social justice. Here, a lot of respondents express that the uniqueness of their work lays in the possibilities they offer people in poverty to participate in the public debate, as they articulate that “we are different, because here people in poverty can step into the limelight”. However, some practitioners then seem to disconnect this participatory-objective from transformative aims, while framing it as a way of strengthening people in poverty as it gives “them the chance to also have such experiences”. Practitioners who stress the importance of participation in public debate for the individual, are then sometimes less concerned about what is said or fought for, since “what they say, is up to them”. While this does not necessarily imply that participants consequently disconnect their participation from the fight for social justice, observations reveal correlations between practitioners’ focus on self-determination and the psychological effects of poverty on participants and how people in poverty step into public debate. When practitioners strongly focus on these components, people in poverty often appeared less combatant while stepping outside or brought the psychological burden of living in poverty to the table. Also our observations disclose that putting the individual growth of people in poverty central sometimes leads to focusing on the creation of an enabling environment in which the big group of people in poverty can take on responsibilities in internal activities in order to stimulate their individual growth, but in which it seems to be believed that practitioners or a handful of people are

best equipped to strive for societal change and the others should or could not be bothered by that (Boone *et al.*, 2018b).

All these tensions and complexities therefore reveal the importance for practitioners to constantly reflect on how the needs of people in poverty to be treated on a par relates to the necessity to denounce their societal economic, political and cultural imparity of participation together with them.

4.7 Concluding discussion

This article contributes to social work literature and practice by expanding the scope of what is implied by the engagement of social work practice in a politics of recognition and respect. It does this by focusing on strategies practitioners use to create enabling niches that connect individual empowerment-objectives with transformative goals. Findings from this research show that the recognition and empowerment of people in poverty is not only enabled through niches in which the strengths of participants are embraced in daily practice, but also through the conception of the transformative potential of such niches in which people in poverty are positioned as indispensable partners in the fight against injustices. Our analysis however also uncovers that creating niches in which people in poverty are considered to be on a par creates a possible danger for practitioners to become blind for the actual 'impairity of participation' of people in poverty or to become reluctant to address these imparities. As such, this research might contribute to the reflection in APRVs and other participatory anti-poverty strategies of how to denounce the subordination of people in poverty on socio-economic and political levels if people precisely appreciate not being addressed on their differences.

As addressed in the article, practitioners expressed hesitance and insecurity while reflecting on the effects of working with people in poverty on a participatory basis in order to stimulate societal change. For example, many practitioners used terms such as "aspiration", "potential", "hope", and "belief" to describe transformative effects of their practice. This highlights the challenge of estimating the influence of participatory anti-poverty strategies on social justice. In contrast, respondents appeared far more secure and eloquent in talking about what the work of APRVs meant for the persons living in poverty, as they know it works or has an effect on the individual growth of participants. It is possible that this seduces some practitioners to focus on empowerment of individual participants to the detriment of pursuing social justice. This highlights the challenge for

APRVs and other social work practices of connecting participatory work with people in poverty to transformative goals. Consequently, an important but difficult task for APRVs – and for other social work practices with transformative aims – might be located in making the sense of connecting individual goals with transformative goals more visible and tangible. This could be done by analysing participatory processes towards social change and reflect on how these potentially have affected social policy and sensitised society. While such analyses are of course not unilinear or straightforward, gaining more insight in this relation might nevertheless be important for stimulating people in poverty to remain committed to the fight against poverty as well as for stimulating practitioners who were previously hesitant in making this constant connection.

Effecting social justice requires practitioners to acknowledge the interplay of economic, cultural and political factors on the status and experiences of people in poverty (Fraser, 2005; Garrett, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Lister, 2013; Webb, 2010). For this reason, practitioners should engage in discussions on material and immaterial deprivation despite the anxiety that this contributes to the 'othering' of people in poverty. Precisely because poverty is something to "abolish, not celebrate" (Dean, 2015, p. 145), differences leading to subordination and deprivation must remain at the heart of social work practice. That said, it is vital that this is always done in a manner that it doesn't instigate a feeling of inferiority of participants, but is framed as a communicative base to talk about injustices in practice as well as in public debate and to create solidarity for and indignation about the unjust nature of the daily struggles people in poverty have to endure (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Tew, 2006).

4.8 References

- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (1995). It's our problem too! Challenging the exclusion of poor people from poverty discourse. *Critical Social Policy*, 15, 75–95.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789

- Davies, K., Gray, M., & Webb, S. (2014). Putting the parity into service-user participation: An integrated model of social justice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 119–127.
- Dean, H. (2015). *Social rights and human welfare*. Oxford: Routledge.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40, 314–321.
- Downward, P., & Mearman, A. (2007). Retroduction as mixed-methods triangulation in economic research: Reorienting economics into social science. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(1), 77–99.
- Driessens, K., & Van Regenmortel, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Bind-Kracht in armoede. Leefwereld en hulpverlening*. Leuven: Lannoo.
- Emerson, R. (2004). Working with key incidents. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 457–72). London: Sage.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the 'postsocialist' condition*. London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120. Retrieved from <https://newleftreview.org/II/3/nancy-fraser-rethinking-recognition>.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88. Retrieved from <https://newleftreview.org/II/36/nancy-fraser-reframing-justice-in-a-globalizing-world>.
- Fraser, N. (2008). Abnormal justice. *Critical Inquiry*, 34, 393–422.
- Garrett, P. M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(5), 1517–1533.
- Garrett, P. M. (2016). Questioning tales of 'ordinary magic': 'Resilience' and neo-liberal reasoning. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(7), 1909–1925.

- Gupta, A., Blumhardt, H., & ATD Fourth World. (2017). Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: The contribution of 'the politics of recognition and respect'. *European Journal of Social work*. Advance online publication: doi: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1287669.
- Houston, S. (2016). Empowering the 'shamed' self: Recognition and critical social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 16(1), 3–21.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of Social Work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. & Benjamin, O. (2010), Critical poverty knowledge. Contesting othering and social distancing. *Current Sociology*, 58, 5, 693–714.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty and the political: Wrestling the political out of and into social work theory, research and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(6), 811–822.
- Lister, R. (2002). A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision making that affects their lives. *Social Policy & Society*, 1, 37–46.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lister, R. (2013). 'Power, not Pity': Poverty and Human Rights. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), 109–123.
- Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 4–17.
- Lorenz, W. (2017). European policy developments and their impact on social work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(1), 17–28.

- Marthinsen, E., & Skjefstad, N. (2011). Recognition as a virtue in social work practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 14(2), 195–212.
- McLaughlin, K. (2014). Recognising social work. The influence of the politics of recognition on social work. *Social Work in Action*, 26(5), 299–312.
- Neuman, W. L. (2010). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Nussbaum, M. (2006). *Frontiers of justice: Disability, nationality, species membership*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- O' Brien, M. (2011). Equality and fairness: Linking social justice and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work*, 1(1), 143–158.
- Poulter, J. (n.d.). *Exploring the systematic nature of social work values*. Retrieved from www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/937.
- Rapp, A. C., & Goscha, J. R. (2012). *The Strengths Model: A recovery-oriented approach to mental health services* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy and Administration*, 46, 807–822.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Schiettecat, T. (2012). Implementing a strengths perspective in child welfare and protection: A challenge not to be taken lightly. *European Journal of Social Work*, 17(1), 3–17.
- Ryke, E., Strydom, H., & Botha, K. (2006). The social niche: Conceptualising the human environment. *International Journal of the Humanities*, 2(3). Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/24700661/The_Social_Niche_Conceptualising_the_Human_Environment
- Singh, G., & Cowden, S. (2015). The intensification of neoliberalism and the commodification of human need: A social work perspective. *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 3(3), 375–387.

- Sullivan, W. P. (1997). On strengths, niches, and recovery from serious mental illness. In Saleebey, D. (Ed.), *The strengths perspective in social work practice* (pp. 183–197). New York: Longman.
- Taylor, J. B. (1997). Niches and practice: Extending the ecological perspective. In D. Saleebey, (Ed.), *The strengths perspective in social work practice* (pp. 217–227). New York: Longman.
- Tew, J. (2006). Understanding power and powerlessness. Towards a framework for emancipatory practice in social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 6(1), 33–51.
- Thompson, S. (2006). *The political theory of recognition: A critical introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Van Hove, G. & Claes, L. (2011) *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*, Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Van Regenmortel, T. (2002). *Empowerment en maatzorg. Een krachtgerichte psychologische kijk op armoede*. Leuven: Acco.
- Van Regenmortel, T. (2009). Empowerment als uitdagend kader voor sociale inclusie en moderne zorg. *Journal of Social Intervention: Theory and Practice*, 18(4), 22–42.
- Van Regenmortel, T. (2011). *Lexicon van empowerment*. Retrieved from http://eropaf.org/lib/publicaties/R1429_lexicon_empowerment.pdf.
- Webb, S. (2010). (Re)Assembling the left: The politics of redistribution and recognition in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2364–2379.

CHAPTER 5

Raising critical consciousness in the
struggle against poverty:
Breaking a culture of silence

ABSTRACT

The participation of people in poverty in anti-poverty strategies has gained tremendous weight. Nevertheless, a critical issue remains underexposed: how can social work practitioners deal with the complexity of engaging people in poverty in the fight against poverty, while the latter often lower their aspirations in line with their societal position? While drawing on the ideas of Paulo Freire, we discuss the findings of an in-depth study in five Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice in Flanders (Belgium). Aiming to stimulate critical consciousness of people in poverty, our qualitative content analysis reveals that practitioners reframe poverty as a collective concern and try to connect experiences of people to a structural analysis. Although practitioners use their power in intentional ways, they however also often mask their own power position. Therefore social workers should learn to acknowledge and openly discuss the power asymmetry in their practices in ways that enable a critical consciousness to flourish, both on the side of the oppressors and the oppressed.

Based on: Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (submitted). Raising critical consciousness in the struggle against poverty: Breaking a culture of silence. *Critical Social Policy*

5.1 Introduction

During recent decades, a diversity of scholars has stressed the vital importance of participatory principles and practices in dealing with poverty and social inequality (Beresford & Croft, 2004; Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2016; Lister, 2004). In this existing body of scholarship, poverty has been framed as a problem of unequal and imbalanced power relationships, resulting in the structural lack of participation and powerlessness of people living in poverty (De Bie, Roets, & Roose, 2013; Doom, 2003; Krumer-Nevo, 2016). As people in poverty are excluded from the process in which poverty and anti-poverty strategies are defined, it is argued that they are merely granted a *passive position* in the social system due to their lack of resources and institutional power. Beresford and Croft already argued back in 1995 that although the dominant debates about poverty were heavily contested and politicised, “people with direct experience of poverty have little place in them. They are largely excluded from the mainstream discussions and developments about poverty” (Beresford & Croft, 1995, p. 76).

From such a stance, participation was – and still is – widely acknowledged as one of the guiding principles in social policy-making and in social work practice. Previous contributions in Critical Social Policy have considered participation strongly in relation to transformative possibilities and aims (Beresford, 2001; Carr, 2007; Farr, 2017; Hodge, 2005), yet also stress that such participatory principles often seem to serve an instrumental goal in contemporary societies (Beresford, 2001; Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Cowden & Singh, 2007). This implies that the complexities involved in connecting participation with transformative aims should not be underestimated, especially at the point when people in poverty and the social workers who support them are required to provoke a social response that is rooted in principles of social justice and solidarity (Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Garrett, 2002; Krumer-Nevo, 2016).

In that vein, we have been drawing on the work of Nancy Fraser, who offers a convincing set of ideas that enables us to capture the complexities and challenges of the social justice aspirations of social work (Garrett, 2010). In previous work (Boone, Roets, & Roose, 2018a, 2018b), we have relied on her concept of ‘parity of participation’ to endorse that “justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life” (Fraser, 2005, p. 73). Her work entails a radical challenge to what she calls ‘affirmative

strategies', implying "remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them" (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). In dealing with injustices that impede parity of participation, she argues that 'transformative strategies' are required, aiming to change the way society is organised (Fraser, 2005). By cross-fertilizing the existing knowledge of poverty with the life knowledge of people in poverty, a pertinent challenge to policy and practice can be constituted, as it entails the opportunity to contest hegemonic discourses and change the existing power relationships in society (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Fraser, 1995, 2005; Krumer-Nevo, 2005; Marston & McDonald, 2012).

However necessary Fraser perceives the establishment of participatory parity as a normative social justice aspiration, a highly relevant critical consideration occurs in her early work with respect to the question of whether it is fair to expect that subordinated minorities, such as people in poverty, are best placed to actively engage in the struggle for social justice. When submitting the needs and claims of minorities "to democratic processes of public justification" (Fraser, 2000, p. 119), we need to take into account that processes in which "members of subordinated groups commonly internalise need interpretations that work to their own disadvantage" (Fraser, 1989, p. 299) can take place.

Following this consideration, the complicated challenge for practitioners who attempt to establish a participatory parity of people in poverty has also been the subject of theoretical contributions to the field of social work (Carrol & Minkler, 2000; Cools *et al.*, 2017; Cowden & Singh, 2007; Tew, 2006). In a recent argument, Cools *et al.* (2017) re-stipulate that:

parity of participation demands that marginalised groups have the opportunity and the capacity to name and claim their needs as being potentially different from those assumed by the social protection, market oriented and/or empowerment discourses that generally underpin social interventions and welfare reforms. (p. 362)

While social workers should embrace this vision and try to achieve social justice and solidarity while transcending the power inferiority of people in poverty, this nevertheless requires a specific awareness of the effects of power, subordination and powerlessness (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). This is specifically the case because people:

may take on the attributions of inferiority that are imposed onto them by dominant groups, lacking sufficient support or social resources with which to content these. They may learn to lower their aspirations in line with their position within the structuring of society. (Tew, 2006, p. 37)

Since “sustained conditions of subjugation can make it difficult for the subaltern or oppressed individual to identify both the reasons for their oppression and what they should do about it” (Cowden & Singh, 2007, p. 17), an important role of social work might thus be situated in encouraging people in poverty to reflect on the connection of their situation to the socio-political context and address their internalised oppression (Barak, 2016). As such, this article is a contribution to how social work practitioners can engage in this complex enterprise.

Since the framework of Fraser mainly offers a philosophical frame of reference that is not easily applicable in social work theory, policy and practice, it does not offer concrete points of reference for how social work practitioners can make sense of these complexities of power and powerlessness, and how to act upon these issues in everyday interactions. Therefore we argue that Fraser needs Freire, as Paulo Freire provides vital ideas for the development of a critical pedagogical social work practice that takes into account, yet also transcends, processes of internalisation and alienation by raising critical consciousness of people in poverty about the collective and structural nature of their problems. In what follows, we thus draw on Freire’s ideas to discuss and analyse the findings of a current research project in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs] in Flanders, to critically explore the complexities arising in social work practices that attempt to raise such critical consciousness of people in poverty.

5.2 The legacy of Paulo Freire in social work

Although the original ideas of *Paulo Freire* stem from his work in a different time and in one of the poorest areas of Brazil, it offers a captivating hermeneutical framework for contemporary social work, explaining what drives and occupies both oppressors and the oppressed (Askeland & Fook, 2009; Barak, 2016; Narayan, 2000; Tew, 2006). In his groundbreaking books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1972), he pays particular attention to how a praxis that challenges and changes power relationships between oppressors and the oppressed can be developed. As his work revolved around situations of poverty in socially unjust situations, he described how

people “were denied participation in creating their own lives” (Narayan, 2000, p. 194) and champions that the oppressed can and should be enabled to regain their sense of humanity. His work crucially refers to the field of tension between control and emancipation that inherently operates in social work practices. As Freire puts it:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (in Mayo, 1999, p. 5)

Since social work practices are embedded and active in the field between control and emancipation (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015) and are “inherently and substantively educational-pedagogical” (Freire in Carrol & Minckler, 2000, p. 8), his work offers an influential source of inspiration for contemporary social workers who want to engage with the struggle for social justice in their work with people in poverty (Barak, 2016). In what follows, we further explore the distinction he makes between ‘a banking’ and ‘problem-posing approach’ to social work.

5.2.1 Creating a culture of silence: a banking concept of social work

Freire describes how the oppressed, through historical processes of domination, have adopted a ‘culture of silence’, by which they have “internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines’ and, as such, “are fearful of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). He illustrates beautifully how a ‘dominant banking concept of education’ was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence. He asserts that the permitted scope of action for individuals and groups in the banking concept of education goes only as far as implementing what is stored in the deposits of people; “[they] are made docile through a lack of creativity [and] transformation; and knowledge (...) is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Here educators are conceived as occupying a value-neutral, objective and rational position, as they perceive reality from the outside, as a fixed, frozen and unchangeable essence:

projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, [which] negates education and knowledge as

processes of inquiry ... The banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. (Freire, 1970, p. 47)

People are, in other words, trained to think and act instrumentally within the boundaries of what is perceived as evident and, consequently, within a praxis prescribed by powerful others. As such, these practices mainly strengthen the myth that some people are inferior to others, and produce a praxis in terms of 'us' and 'them' (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). This is rooted in the mindset of the oppressed, making them, blind to the knowledge that they are merely granted a passive positing in the societal and historical transformation of society and this might also be part of the mindset of the oppressors, making them blind for the oppression they take part in (Freire, 1970, 1972).

Following on from this, contemporary social work has been critiqued for withdrawing from issues of social justice (Marston & McDonald, 2012) and for ignoring the inherent power relations in social work, since it can be situated as "part of a status apparatus geared to exercise control over those (...) that may be particularly angered by their life experience of social injustice" (Tew, 2006, p. 37). Frequently, social work embraces designs to solve problems prescribed by social policy practice, functioning as an instrumental strategy in line with social policy, which prescribes clear-cut solutions for social problems (Roose, Roets, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2012). In this 'banking concept of social work', activities are designed to compensate for social problems, to adjust individuals and groups in society or to contribute to what Fraser has designated as affirmative strategies in the fight for social justice (Boone *et al.*, 2018a).

5.2.2 Towards cultural action for freedom: a problem-posing concept of social work

Freire denounces such fatalistic and dichotomous views that are produced by unequal power relationships, emphasising the necessity of transformative strategies, which reveal "a force capable of announcing justice" (Freire, 1997, p. 37). He makes a plea for cultural action for freedom, with reference to "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 52). Essential to such education is the development of a critical consciousness "of the contradictions and elements in all of our lives as oppressed and oppressors, as well as an understanding of the structures of oppression" (Larson & Allen, 2006, p. 508). Through this deepening attitude of awareness, emerging from people's submergence in the dense, enveloping reality of life situations (Freire, 1970), the oppressed—and in a later stage also

the oppressors—can gain a critical consciousness and break through their internalised and taken-for-granted culture of silence (Barak, 2016; Narayan, 2000). In such pedagogical praxis, the educator cannot be considered to be neutral; since “no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors” (Freire, 1970, p. 30). Rather than depositing knowledge into the oppressed, the educator engages in dialogical processes through a circle of articulating and discussing the lifeworld or worldviews of the oppressed, while simultaneously experiencing this world (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009).

For social work, this implies that the social worker is never neutral, nor should (s)he be; social workers can influence inequality with a desire to work with/in the world to change it. According to Freire (1970, 1972), this requires the courage to think and act within an uncertain framework: what emerges as the hallmark of reflexive praxis is this search for ‘the social’, through which social problems that are individualised, such as poverty, can become social problems again. During such problem-posing process, the interpretation and imagination of another and more socially just reality is emerging (again) (Roose *et al.*, 2012).

5.3 Raising critical consciousness through social work practices: a complex and ambiguous venture

In a Freirean sense, social work has the potential to contribute to processes in which a critical consciousness of people in poverty emerges (Barak, 2016). Also, by an engagement towards an understanding of the deeper structures of the experience of injustice of people in poverty within the economic, cultural and political domain, this possibly enables the ability to collaboratively raise critical consciousness in broader society and change power inequalities in society (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Opposed to imposing the social worker’s own worldviews onto people, promoting critical consciousness in social work practice “must come in a dialogic form that would reduce this power inequality, so that the medium of the relationship itself - and not just the content of the interaction - would equalise power differences” (Barak, 2016, p. 1778).

Therefore, social workers have to take a stance in their praxis which is a matter of how social workers might deal with their professional power (Krumer-Nevo,

2016; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). This issue is rife with complexity and ambiguity, as “social work is neither exclusively emancipatory nor controlling, but elements of control and emancipation are always intertwined in practice” (Roose *et al.*, 2012, p. 1593). Moreover, committing to a problem-posing approach in social work requires the continuous questioning of whether the consideration of people in poverty as ‘culturally silenced’ does not recreate “the very paternalistic relations of power over between practitioner and service user”, which social workers are trying to overturn (Tew, 2006, p. 37). Although people in poverty have been marginalised in society, they also exercise power and actively show resistance towards oppression in their daily interactions (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Consequently the role of practitioners therefore might not lay in rescuing people from their passive undergoing of oppression as if power were something unidirectional, but in collaboratively and dialogically engaging in processes that reveal the underlying collective and structural nature of experiences of injustice of people in poverty (Tew, 2006).

Such complex matters therefore require further empirical research in concrete social work practices. In what follows, we will draw on our study in five ‘Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice’ [APRVs], to shed light on how social workers attempt to break a culture of silence in their work with people in poverty while raising critical consciousness, and to explore the power issues such processes bring to the surface.

5.4 Methodology

5.4.1 Research context

We engaged in an in-depth case study (Van Hove & Claes, 2011) of how Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs] attempt to break the culture of silence when developing their work with people in poverty. APRVs are anti-poverty social work organisations in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium). There are 59 different APRVs, which are subsidised by the Poverty Decree (Flemish Government, 2003) in order to fulfill six goals: 1) continuously seek out new people in poverty, 2) enable people in poverty to unite, 3) give voice to people in poverty, 4) work towards their social emancipation, 5) change social structures, and 6) create dialogue and training activities to enhance the solidarity of people in poverty and the non-poor. In their overall mission statement (Network Against Poverty, 2003) it is pointed out that

parity of participation is not only a goal in society but also a basic premise in shaping their daily practices.

In almost all APRVs, one or more social work practitioners are employed to take on the overall responsibility for daily practice, although there are a few APRVs in which people take on this task on a voluntary base. While these practitioners take on the overall responsibility of fulfilling the goals of the organisation, daily practice is shaped through the collaboration with volunteers, which can be people with or without poverty-experience, or a mix of the two. In our research, five APRVs were selected on the basis of five criteria: a) their location in the different provinces of Flanders and diversity in terms of urban and rural environments of the APRVs, b) their origins, c) the number of paid workers, d) the people they aim to reach, and e) the sort of activities they conduct (see chapter 1).

5.4.2 Strategies of data collection and analysis

At the start of the case study, all participants were informed about the presence of the researcher and the purpose of the study before being asked for their formal consent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher explained that all information would be treated anonymously and would be used only for the purpose of a general analysis, and would not serve to provide conclusions about one organisation or respondent in particular.

In the first phase of this study, participatory observations (n=80) were conducted in those organisations, specifically focusing on group activities where people meet one another to delineate their work and joint activities. These activities mostly had a duration of around two to three hours. All observations were recorded in a logbook. In a second phase of the study, in-depth individual interviews with practitioners (these were individual interviews, since the questions involved concrete observations of their ways of acting, n=13), and group interviews with participants of those five organisations living in poverty (n=10 groups, total of 34 interviewees) and with volunteers of two organisations (n=2 groups, total of nine interviewees) were conducted. The interviews, ranging between one hour and two hours, were all fully transcribed (Howitt, 2010). Conclusively, two focus-groups (Van Hove & Claes, 2011) were organised in order to discuss some findings with practitioners of the broader population of APRVs (n=13, practitioners of thirteen APRVs).

Throughout the research process, all data generated in the observations and interviews were analysed via a 'directed approach to qualitative content analysis', which offers opportunities to support and extend existing theoretical knowledge and to give meaning to a large amount of data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The theoretical ideas of Paulo Freire were applied to theorise the strategies of social practitioners in dealing with their complex role, enabling the identification of core themes and subject matter in the data (Patton, 2002).

5.5 Research findings

Whilst systematically engaging with all the material, three key themes were distinguished relating to how practitioners in APRVs develop strategies to stimulate critical consciousness of people in poverty: 1) reframing poverty as a collective issue, 2) linking experiences to injustice, and 3) using power while stimulating critical consciousness. These strategies will be discussed below.

5.5.1 Reframing poverty as a collective issue

We have theoretically outlined that people in poverty are culturally silenced and placed in the margins of society while being oblivious to their potential role in the transformation of society (Freire, 1970, 1972). In the research, this shines through when some people in poverty frame their problems as being a "psychological burden", "not finding connection with the broader society" and as "not expecting more money but respect for who they are". Consequently the need for acknowledgement, recognition and meeting people with similar life worlds predominates, rather than an engagement to critically reflect on the structural conditions of their situations. For practitioners in APRVs, this implies a balancing act between giving recognition to such personal needs, and trying to illuminate structural components and collective concerns through participatory processes with people in poverty. An observation in a substantial theme group exemplifies this, where participants discussed the main focus of the group.

After 1,5 hours of attempting to formulate goals of the meeting, a participant asks the practitioner: 'Should our theme-work center around organisations or our feelings?' The worker answers: 'we choose our themes'. The participants express that, above all, they prefer a supportive meeting venue where they are able to talk about their burdens. The practitioner does not object, but says to me directly after the meeting: 'I do not know what to do anymore, they want something

psychological again'. (Observation Org.3)

Such observation exemplifies how quite a lot of practitioners expressed the complexity of their work in connecting the need of people to discuss their personal problems with the broader socio-political context. In an attempt to resolve this complexity, some practitioners feel provoked to develop affirmative strategies in the struggle against poverty, with reference to bringing people together in order to teach them skills in dealing with poverty (e.g. how to budget wisely) or providing them with strategies to cope with their situation (e.g. bringing people together to enable them to “learn to be happy through simple life”). Nevertheless, most practitioners are aware, to some extent, of the importance of also raising awareness on the unjust nature of poverty-situations while trying to give place to the personal issues of people in practice. A practitioner working with people without legal citizenship explained her vision:

We share the indignation, especially because a lot of the participants have the impression that it is normal what happens to them. They are pressured into thinking that they have no rights at all, that they cannot do anything. I believe a big part of our job is supporting people in sharing our vision that it is not normal and empower people in that sense. (Interview Org.2a)

While some participants of APRVs articulated an awareness of the injustice of their problems, this is also often not the case, exemplifying the vital importance of practitioners in APRVs of breaking through the internalised idea that society imposed to people that they are powerless or to blame for their own situation. In that sense, Freire (1972) emphasises the critical process that is necessary to challenge oppressive social, political and economic contradictions and to take measures against the oppressive relations of the reality of the world. Being interrelated with individual conscious-raising, raising such critical consciousness always involves groups of people coming together and to discuss situations that affect their existence (Carroll & Minkler, 2000). As Freire points out:

In order for the oppressed to unite, they must first cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds them to the world of oppression; the unity which links them to each other must be of a different nature. (in Mayo, 1999, p. 73)

In the work of APRVs, such ‘processes of collectivisation’ appear as the core of their work. An emphasis is placed upon the premise of giving attention to

individual processes through which participants can gradually make in-depth contact with (participants of) the group and/or with practitioners. A participant who experienced intergenerational poverty explained that, due to his distrust resulting from a history of poverty, domestic abuse and drugs, he just sat in a corner at group meetings when he came to the organisation in the beginning. However, the patience and continuous involvement of a practitioner enabled him to break his silence: "I started to connect and expressed parts of my life-stories, but it took me years" (interview Org.1d R1). Moreover, an essential component in this 'process-oriented approach' is bringing people in poverty together, enabling participants to lose their sense of blame and shame for their situation, as articulated by the following practitioner:

Most people, especially the most deprived, lived isolated before coming here and are convinced that it is their problem, their fault and their responsibility to get out of that situation. We try to get them out of those thought processes, which starts just by coming here and feeling: I am not alone. (Interview Org.1a)

The observations in the group gatherings reflect how practitioners attempt to 'frame poverty as a collective issue and concern', for instance, as exemplified through a group dialogue:

A woman gets very upset and angry when stating how not having legal documents influences the life of her children. After a while, practitioner A says: 'for that reason our meetings are vital, because there are so many signals and political change is necessary'. The conversation continues around the idea of communication with the secretary of state for asylum and migration. When practitioner B asks the group what the goal should be of this meeting, another participant says that she wants to bring her own situation forward. Practitioner B then asks: 'your own situation or everybody's?'. The woman responds: 'everybody with children'. (Observation Org.2)

Essential to these processes is the inherent potential for reflection to move beyond a framing of poverty-related issues as individual problems. As such, "group members [are enabled to] listen for the issues contained in their own experiences and dialogue about common problems, their root causes and their interconnections" (Freire in Carroll & Minkler, 2000, p. 24).

5.5.2 Connecting experiences to structural components and injustice

In the previous part, it was revealed that the engagement of practitioners towards collectivisation provides the base for people in poverty to connect their own experiences to the consciousness that these relate to the oppressive and structural nature of poverty. Building on such a foundation, practitioners in APRVs also engage more directly in providing this connection.

On the one hand – and in line with the dialogical framework of Freire – practitioners engage in open conversations with people in poverty, where space is provided for people to bring in anecdotes, experiences, questions, and practitioners take on the role of ‘asking questions’ about these situations. This is partially done by practitioners to learn about the finesse of every situation, but also as a way to stimulate critical consciousness with people in poverty about the injustices in their situations. This is for instance exemplified in the next example:

In the group meeting, every participant was asked to tell their own story on how they became incapacitated to work. The practitioner regularly asks questions for clarification. By going into such detail about those stories, the complexity and uniqueness of every story, but also some similarities in every story are revealed. At a certain point the practitioner asks: ‘what do we see in all those stories?’ The group starts discussing that a major component is the different experiences – some positive, some negative - they have with the doctor who decides if people get a substitute income or should go back to work. A participant says: ‘it all seems so random, so arbitrary’. Another person tells the story about her husband who was treated very incorrectly, forced to go back to work even when he was incapable of doing so, as if it were the doctor ‘had stronger quota’ to reach. the practitioner says: ‘what do we take out of this?’ A group-member responds: ‘it is all so unjust, we should do something about it’. (Observation Org.3)

Secondly, our analysis reveals that, in order to stimulate a structural perspective on poverty, practitioners often more directly bring their own knowledge or “the knowledge of professionals who act within a framework to fight poverty” (Krumer-Nevo, 2005, p. 100) into play. Practitioners in APRVs often offer information about subjects that interfere with the lives of people in poverty, and provide social interpretations and context in those matters. Since a lot of information is framed

or expressed in a way that is not considered to be accessible for people in poverty, this also implies that practitioners 'translate and reframe complex material in accessible ways'. They frequently give, for example, information about rights, services and regulations in society, simultaneously informing people and linking this information to the bigger picture of the problem of poverty. An observation of an internal participation channel makes this clear:

Reference is made to a planned activity of the umbrella organisation about social corrections. The chair first starts by explaining the idea of social corrections and giving information about some new measures (on energy, bonus for housing, registration fee for schools), while expressing that most of these measures do not benefit people in poverty since they imply a net loss of means in reality, even with the implementation of social corrections. He then asks who wants to join him to the activity of the umbrella organisation. (Observation Org.4)

Since the adaptation of a culture of silence can result in compliance with dominant societal logics, practitioners also sometimes actively and directly engage in 'challenging stereotypical discourses' by bringing own perspectives and ideas on the subject into dialogue with people in poverty:

A woman states that a lot of refugees nest in social care, being unwilling to work. Practitioner X states: 'Such stories are claimed by politicians, but we all know—including you since you are also actively seeking for a job—that there is no work.' Practitioner Y explains the system of social security, and says that there is a dominant discourse about profiteers despite the fact that she knows a lot of people who don't get the chance to work. The woman replies that she does not know any Syrian that make an effort. Practitioner Y says: 'I am sorry, but I do not agree'. Practitioner X then states that she is happy to support people who are not able to work due to for instance health issues. (Observation Org.2)

In a same vein, practitioners 'stimulate indignation' on the unjust nature of poverty by their actions. For instance, in a substantial participation channel in which people in poverty, volunteers and practitioners participate, every meeting starts with a round 'news and experiences of exclusion and change', in which every participant can express moments in which they say something happen in society that is unjust or in which they experience positive change. Practitioners in all APRVs also very often 'refer to human and social rights' as a way to sharpen an individual as well as the collective indignation:

I gained insight because practitioners in activities or during conversations say: 'equality implies that we depart from the premise that everybody has the same rights, that everybody should be treated from the idea of parity ... And gradually, it became clear for me'. (Group-interview Org.1g, R2)

The importance of referring to rights as a way to stimulate indignation is made more concrete through the following example of an observation in a group that works with parents without formal citizenship,

The practitioner informs the group about the Universal Rights of Humans and Children that should be guaranteed by our country, while emphasizing that their children's interest should also be considered while dealing with their citizenship application. The practitioner asks the participants if the interest of their children prevails in their communication with authorities, while stating: 'I think it is clear this is not the case'. (Observation Org.2)

Our analysis thus reveals that connecting personal experiences with injustice is partially done by practitioners through asking questions in which people in poverty might gain another perspective on their situation. Also, we have revealed that this is often done more directly by bringing knowledge, perspectives and interpretation of professionals into play. While this might support people in concrete life situations and enable alternative perspectives on the issue of poverty, the *directivity* that shines through in such examples, also raises questions of how this relates to the idea of Freire (1972) of being in authentic dialogue or in "communion" (p. 68) with the oppressed to enable critical consciousness. We will further discuss this issue below.

5.5.3 Using power while stimulating critical consciousness

Although "differences between educators and learners have to be mitigated as far as possible" (Mayo, 1999, p. 68), Freire does acknowledge the directive role of educators. He states that "at the moment the teacher begins the dialogue, he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizon that he or she wants to get to" (in Mayo, 1999, p. 66).

With regard to the work of APRVs it is first of all important to mention that while the participation of participants is essential, practitioners get a firm mandate from

participants to take the lead in substantial work. As one of the participants describes:

You have the organisation with its vision and governmental criteria, and the practitioner should make sure that these are fulfilled. On the other hand you have the freedom of the group to discuss things in the organisation itself. (Interview Org.5e, R3)

Evidentially, our observations indeed expose the directive role of practitioners, for instance in structuring meetings, in determining the agenda or in the manner in which certain subjects are introduced, discussed and framed. The following observation exemplifies such 'steering'. Here a practitioner asks the group "what should people who are not familiar with the organisation know about us?"

The participants mention openness, communication, recognition and respect. The practitioner writes all key-words down on a blackboard and says after a while: 'we said a lot about the emotional side, but what should be known about AN APRV?' Participants then name non-material help and the collaboration between people in poverty and their allies. Suddenly a participant asserts: 'combating poverty'. The worker interrupts the group conversation and asks the person to explain this. He says: 'the structural component', on which the worker asks to clarify this while looking at the whole group. Another participant says: 'not for one person' and another practitioner supplements: 'making the difference for a bigger group'. Another participant says: 'tackling the system, see it broader than your own problems'.

The conversation then goes on to another subject. The practitioner leaves space on the blackboard under the structural component, while later returning to this subject matter: 'now what about the structural?' The participants mention 'bringing problems to society' and 'making a collective story to have more influence'. The practitioner nods, asking 'okay, have we now said enough?' (Observation Org.1)

While such example reveals that steering of practitioners is often intentionally aimed at bringing structural components into dialogue, this does not necessarily contradict authentic dialogue and participation, since it is often done in a querying way. However, the complexity of using directive dialogue without impeding the worldviews of the people they are working with should not be underestimated. The following observation gives a glimpse of this complex task.

Practitioner X asks the volunteers responsible for the distribution of food packages what to do with a new request for three people to receive a package, since there is no place in the current form. One person raises the idea to organise the distribution every two weeks instead of on a weekly basis. Practitioner X asks if everybody agrees. The group then suggests that presence at substantial meetings should be a condition for receiving a package. Practitioner Y interrupts: 'Me AS A PRACTITIONER don't consider it justified to use that as a mechanism to pressurise people'. Practitioner X also states that he cannot support such sanctioning. The group then agrees not to do it like that. (Observation Org.2)

The explicit quest of practitioners to embrace a structural framing of poverty rather than employing principles of conditionality (Dwyer, 2004) might be crucial here. Surprisingly, however, such example also seems to suggest that when practitioners fear that their opinion differs from what participants deem crucial, they might have a certain hesitance to engage in a substantial talk about what practitioners support, on what ground and for what reasons, and even block the conversation by for instance referring to their position or expertise as a mandated practitioner. Similarly, our observations reveal that practitioners sometimes 'mask their directive role' by conveying the idea that participants have the directive power. An observation in a participation channel in which a new candidate member was chosen exemplifies such maneuvers. Normally the choice for representatives is discussed in the meeting itself, first launching an open call to all participants of the organisation to express their interest. However, there was no open call, as the new candidate member has been pushed by the practitioners and chair, and is already present at the assembly. This is their explanation at the meeting itself:

The practitioner explains that she was talking with her colleague about the replacement and that both of them mentioned a particular person X, and 'it just happened that X at that time entered the office and so we just asked her spontaneously and therefore she is already here today. Does everybody agree or does somebody have a problem with it?' People look somewhat awkwardly to one another, not really welcoming the new member, but also not objecting. (Observation Org.3)

While participatory parity is often pursued through an open dialogue between practitioners and participants, the incapacity of practitioners to recognise the power asymmetry sometimes results in subtly adopting an expert position in the

discussion without acknowledging such positioning. Such implicit—even explicit—disagreement runs the danger of reinforcing the power differences in the position between workers and participants. A practitioner formulates it as:

You cannot leave everything up to the group and you have to steer with the substantial lines in your head (...) You can give participants the choice, but how you do this will be decisive for what people choose. You can manipulate it. (Interview Org.3b)

Whilst Freire (1970) acknowledges the difference between practitioners and participants, he objects to authoritarianism: “Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organise the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress” (p. 145). While all practitioners are committed to such open dialogue, our research reveals the complexity and struggle of practitioners in finding the balance between discussing substantive issues with participants who are not necessarily eager to fight for structural change, while trying to put the fight for social justice and transformative ways of thinking in combatting poverty on the foreground.

5.6 Concluding reflections

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, p. 46)

Taking parity of participation as a normative social justice aspiration, also implies taking the participation of people in poverty to heart in social work practices aimed at societal change and social justice. However at the beginning of this article, the complexity of this task was emphasised by making clear that people in poverty often take on aspirations and interpretations that work to their own disadvantage (Cowden & Singh, 2007; Fraser, 1989; Freire, 1970 & 1972; Tew, 2006). Inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, we therefore embraced the idea that social work practitioners might be very well positioned to break the culture of silence and engage in cultural action for freedom during our empirical research conducted in APRVs.

Our analysis shows that practitioners have an *essential role* to play in the development of a critical consciousness of people in poverty about the unjust nature of poverty. Moreover, they actively connect personal experiences with a

structural analysis by asking questions, by providing information and interpretation, and by actively linking experiences to principles of rights, solidarity and the equality of human beings. Such strategies offer opportunities to result:

in a critical perspective on society that redefines individual, group, or community problems as emerging from a lack of power. This consciousness allows them to focus their energies on the causes of their problems, rather than changing their subjective internal states.
(Gutierrez, 1990, p. 150)

Also practitioners often steer very directly in APRVs in order to engage in substantial processes to make societal change possible, exemplifying the inevitable complexity and ambiguity (Roose *et al.*, 2012; Boone *et al.*, 2018a) in social work in trying to negotiate between affirmative and transformative strategies in the struggle against poverty.

Therefore, our findings urge us to emphasise the complexity of implementing Freirean ideas into social work practices that aim for participatory parity in society as well as take the premise of parity of participation to heart in shaping practice. Here an important question might be as to whether it is desirable to believe that social work practice should be based on equal and reciprocal power relationships? Our research findings show that practitioners often use their power very intentionally, but also suggest that the ideal of participatory parity as a “new tyranny” (Cook & Kothari, 2001) runs the danger of creating a ‘masking practitioner’, who is reluctant to reveal, and be aware of, inherent power issues. When their powerful position is concealed and the idea is conveyed that people in poverty have the power of decision, dialogue about the meaning of oppressive experiences vanishes (Freire, 1970). As such, social workers might become part of the collusive and oppressive power relations they desperately want to challenge.

However, power in itself per se should not be problematised; how practitioners use their power can in some cases be regarded as productive, when it enables “the protection over those who may be vulnerable” (Tew, 2006, p. 39). We therefore believe it requires social workers who are capable of acknowledging, revealing and openly discussing the power asymmetry in the practices they develop when they are striving for the participatory parity of people in poverty. Such a praxis entails the willingness to embrace complexity and ambiguity, and requires “social workers being able to choose when and how to negotiate, relinquish and exercise power” (Sakomoto & Pitner, 2005, p. 447). When the

ideal of participatory parity in those practices is no longer perceived as being equal, horizontal or free of power differences, “questions of difference need no longer be feared as a potential basis for subordination or exclusion, but may be valued as a resource that can open up new forms of creativity and opportunity” (Tew, 2006, p. 38). Here participants as well as practitioners can become conscious about the internalisation of structural oppression and stimulate public dialogue about this issue. In that sense, a critical consciousness about the oppression of people in poverty and the injustices of their situation might flourish, both on the side of the oppressors and the oppressed. As such, the pedagogy of the oppressed becomes a “pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation” (Freire, 1970, p. 31), making the fight for social justice more than a case of people in poverty themselves, but a societal responsibility.

5.7 References

- Askeland, G.A., & Fook, J. (2009). Critical reflection in social work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 12(3), 287–292.
- Barak, A. (2016). Critical consciousness in critical social work: Learning from the theatre of the oppressed. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1776–1792.
- Beresford, P. (2001). Service users, social policy and the future of welfare. *Critical Social Policy*, 21(4), 494–512.
- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (2004). Service users and practitioners reunited. The key component for social work reform. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(1), 53–68.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018a). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018b). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789

- Bouverne- De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek. Een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Carr, S. (2007). Participation, power, conflict and change: Theorizing dynamics of service user participation in the social care system of England and Wales. *Critical Social Policy*, 27(2), 266–276.
- Carroll, J., & Minkler, M. (2000). Freire's message for social workers: Looking back, looking ahead. *Journal of Community practice*, 8(1), 21–36
- Cook, B., & Kothari, U. (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* New York: Zed Books.
- Cools, P., Leggio, D.L., Matras, Y., & Oosterlynck, S. (2017). 'Parity of Participation' and the politics of needs interpretation: Engagement with Roma migrants in Manchester. *Journal of Social Policy*. Advance Access published 25 July 2017. doi: 10.1017/S0047279417000575
- Cornwall, A., & Brock, K. (2005). What do buzzwords do for development policy? A critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(7), 1043–1060.
- Cowden, S., & Singh, G. (2007). The 'user': Friend, foe or fetish? A critical exploration of user involvement in health and social care. *Critical Social Policy*, 27(1), 5–23.
- De Bie, M., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2013). Participatie en armoedebestrijding: Een democratisch vraagstuk. In J. Mostinckx, F. Deven & P. Dauwe (Eds.), *Welzijn en Zorg in Vlaanderen. Wegwijzer voor de Sociale Sector* (pp. 467–482). Mechelen: Wolters Kluwen.
- Doom, R. (2003). Armoede: een essay van de open deur. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 245–277). Gent: Academia Press.
- Dwyer, P. (2004). Creeping conditionality in the UK: From welfare rights to conditional entitlements? *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(2), 265–287.
- Farr, M. (2017). Power dynamics and collaborative mechanisms in co-production and co-design processes. *Critical Social Policy*. Advance Access published 13 December 2017. doi:10.1177/0261018317747444

- Flemish Government (2003) *Decreet betreffende de armoedebestrijding*. Retrieved from http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=2003032143&table_name=wet (accessed 10/10/2017).
- Fraser, N. (1989). Talking about needs: Interpretative contests as political conflicts in welfare-state societies. *Ethics*, 99(2), 291–313.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition. Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin books.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the heart*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Garrett, P.M. (2002). Social work and the just society. Diversity, difference and the sequestration of poverty. *Journal of Social Work*, 2(2), 187–210.
- Garrett, P.M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(5), 1517–1533.
- Grunwald, K., & Thiersch, H. (2009). The concept of “lifeworld orientation” for social work and social care. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23(2), 131–46.
- Gutierrez, L.M. (1990). Working with women of color: An empowerment perspective. *Social Work*, 35(2), 149–53.
- Hodge, S. (2005). Participation, discourse and power: A case study in service user involvement. *Critical Social Policy*, 25(2), 164–179.
- Howitt, D. (2010). *Introduction to qualitative methods in psychology*. Loughborough University: Pearson Education Limited.

- Hsieh, H.F., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2005). Listening to 'life knowledge': A new research direction in poverty studies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 99–106.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Larson, G., & Allen, H. (2006). Conscientization: The experience of Canadian social work students in Mexico. *International Social Work*, 49(4), 507–518.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social practitioners as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Mayo, P. (1999). *Gramsci, Freire and adult education: Possibilities for transformative action*. London: Zed Books.
- Narayan, L. (2000). Freire and Gandhi: The relevance for social work education. *International Social Work*, 43(2), 193–204.
- Network against Poverty. (2003). *Gewoon mens mogen zijn!* Retrieved from <http://netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Visietekst-Vlaams-Netwerk.pdf>.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social Work: In search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592–1607.
- Sakamoto, I., & Pitner, R.O. (2005). Use of critical consciousness in anti-oppressive social work practice. Disentangling power dynamics at personal and structural levels. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35(4), 435–452.
- Tew, J. (2006). Understanding power and powerlessness. Towards a framework for emancipatory practice in social work. *Journal of Social Work*, 6(1), 33–51.

Van Hove G., & Claes L (2011). *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

CHAPTER 6

Learning to play chess:
How to make sense of a politics of
representation with people in poverty
when aiming for social change

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing involvement of people in poverty in social policy, their participation does not necessarily take place on a par with policy makers, as the latter often do not really embrace their demands for social justice. It is therefore argued that social work has a role to play in the process of merging knowledge of people in poverty with that of policy makers and other stake-holders by representing their perspectives in public debate.

By drawing on an in-depth qualitative research of five Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice (Belgium), the complexity of the direct participation of people in poverty in such a politics of representation is analysed, as well as the different roles social work practitioners can take on in dealing with this complexity. Here two roles are distinguished: 'a guardian of collective and transformative elements'; and 'a strategical chess player'. Conclusively it is argued that there is a need for practitioners who are able to reflect critically on participatory premises and estimate whether these contribute to societal change, or if other strategies need to be considered. However, from the social justice ideal of parity of participation, such strategic considerations should always be collaboratively discussed with people in poverty.

Based on: Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (submitted). Learning to play chess: How to make sense of a politics of representation with people in poverty when aiming for social change. *Social Policy & Administration*

6.1 Introduction

In recent decades, listening to the voices of people in poverty and stimulating their direct participation in research, practice as well as in processes of policy-making has been regarded as essential (Askheim *et al.*, 2017; Beresford, 2010; Beresford & Croft, 1995, 2004; De Corte *et al.*, 2018; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2016; Lister, 2004; Postle & Beresford, 2007). Yet, despite the fact that participation of people in poverty has become a 'buzzword' (Cools *et al.*, 2017; Cornwall & Brock, 2005), they have not necessarily influenced the debate about poverty or the measures to fight it due to the lingering discrepancy between the world of policy-making and the actual lives of people in poverty (De Bie *et al.*, 2013). This implies that although societal efforts are made to include people in poverty through all types of representative and participatory ventures and practices, differences in status, power and resources do not just vanish and, consequently, exclusion mechanisms are often at stake in such processes (Beresford & Croft, 1995; Hickey & Bracking, 2005). In this regard, it has been argued that even though people in poverty may be involved in policy-making, policy makers often do not really embrace their demands for social justice and social change (Cools *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Thompson, 2009). The perspectives and stories of people in poverty are often perceived as "hostile information" (Rainwater in Krumer-Nevo, 2017, p. 812) when their point of view deviates from dominant perspectives. On such occasions, the participation of people in poverty is not considered to take place on a par with others in policy-making since "the disadvantaged insiders are unable to successfully demand the reforms that would make democratic deliberation an effective vehicle for the achievement of justice" (Thompson, 2009, p. 1085).

In relation to this issue, an influential book edited by Cook and Kathari called 'Participation: The New Tyranny?' (2001) addressed that participatory approaches often have lost their critical engagement with the political and transformative objectives, and have rather become dogmatic and depoliticising instruments for the integration of people. In that sense, Hickey and Mohan (2004) capture this issue beautifully while stating that: "participation managed to 'tyrannize' development debates without sufficient evidence that participatory approaches were living up to the promise of empowerment and transformative development for marginal people" (p.3). In a direct relation to social policy, the power-related-issues of participatory process were also discussed in previous contributions in the journal *Social Policy and Administration* (Roets *et al.*, 2012;

Cook, 2002; De Corte *et al.*, 2018; Prior & Barnes, 2011). While stressing that social policy should not only “talk the talk” but also “walk the walk” (Cook, 2002, p. 529), Roets *et al.* (2012) have argued that social policy therefore should “develop elasticity in fundamentally transforming the power structure of the collective instead of empowering people in poverty to adapt to taken-for-granted practices” (p. 819). Consequently, it is vitally important to transcend conceptualizations of representativeness in which it is formalised and construed as a technical or instrumental question of bringing representatives into the discussion who tell a ‘typical’ and ‘non-threatening’ story, while their mandate to speak is called into question when they challenge the status quo (Beresford, 2010; Beresford & Campbell, 1994; Krumer-Nevo, 2017). Here Beresford and Campbell (1994) assert that conceiving participatory ventures should shift into reconsidering how “[the] perspective, views, interests, demands and rights [of people in poverty can be] fully represented in discussion, forums and decision-making” (p. 186). In regard with this idea and deriving from the strong commitment of social work practices to participatory principles and the struggle for social justice, a lot of authors have stressed the potential role of social work and social practitioners in addressing and tackling such power issues (e.g. Beresford, 2002; Beresford & Croft, 2004; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012; Thompson, 2009), while stating that social workers are important policy actors (Marston & McDonald, 2012; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2014) and should actively and continuously engage in representing the perspectives of people in poverty to the society (Krumer-Nevo, 2008, 2016, 2017).

In this article we will first attempt to map out what the engagement in such a politics of representation can imply for social work in conceptual and theoretical terms. Second, we will elaborate on the findings of a current qualitative research project on Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium). While drawing on our empirical data, the main objective of this article is to analyse the complexity of the direct participation of people in poverty in such a politics of representation aimed at policy and societal change, and to discuss the differing stance and role social work practitioners can take on in dealing with this complexity.

6.2 Representing the perspectives of people in poverty through social work: confronting and merging knowledge

The general theory of social justice of Nancy Fraser (1989, 1990, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2010) starts with the idea that “justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life” (Fraser, 2005, p. 73). Consequently, she brings three domains of social injustice forward that prohibit people from participating on a par with others: the ‘economic’ – dealing with the unequal division of material resources, the ‘cultural’ - touching “institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value” (Fraser, 2010, p. 16) and the ‘political’ - implying that certain individuals and groups in society do not have an equal voice in the debates surrounding social justice. With the ambition of social justice in mind, Fraser (2005) makes a plea to tackle these injustices in order to achieve ‘parity of participation’, while distinguishing affirmative and transformative strategies. Where the former merely deal with the implications of injustices without challenging unequal social relations, she argues for the latter since these strategies aim to transform the underlying normative social framework. Based on an exploration of her earlier work (1989, 1990), her idea of ‘counterpublics’ is inspiring to complement these ideas, with reference to “discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67).

Building on her ideas, social work practices might have a specific position as they receive their mandate partially from the state to mediate in the field between private interests and public concerns (Lorenz, 2014). Consequently, the potential of social work might be situated in supporting the creation of ‘cultural forums’ in which people in poverty can meet one another, collaboratively discuss experiences of injustice in different life-domains and represent and discuss these insights, perspectives and concerns with/in society (Boone, Roets & Roose, 2018a). Social work practitioners can thus not only be deeply involved in participatory ventures in which people in poverty can voice their experiences of injustice and powerlessness in their everyday lives, but can also create opportunities in which the perspectives of “those silent and oppressed groups or publics whose voice is drowned out by more vocal and powerful publics” (Dean, 2013, p. 134) are represented in the public debate. By the engagement in such ‘politics of representation’, different perspectives can confront and meet one another by which social and public debate about the problem of poverty and

strategies to fight it is stimulated. In creating such cultural forums, social work can be persistently involved in attempts to change and transform societal perspectives, policies and ideas to tackle poverty in the pursuit of social justice (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Gates, 2017; Juhila, 2008), and offer opportunities “to challenge dominant discourses and reconstruct new strategies beyond such (present) boundaries” (Stepney, 2006, p. 1303).

It has, however, been argued that critical considerations should continuously be posed in relation to the question whether such politics of representation relate to the pursuit of participatory parity and deal with power-related issues (Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b; Davies *et al.*, 2014; Philips, 2004; Webb, 2010). Consequently, the promotion of the participation of, and collaboration with, people in poverty is vital, “if social workers are to claim legitimate representation and demonstrate that they are not simply self-serving” (Mosley, 2013, p. 7). From such a stance, the body of work of Michal Krumer-Nevo (2005, 2008, 2009, 2016, 2017; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010) is inspiring, since she clearly advocates for a social justice agenda and pays a lot of attention to the position of people in poverty in social work practice that aims to influence the social debate surrounding poverty. Relying on the work of Lister (2004), Krumer-Nevo asserts that a political perspective on poverty should “place poverty in the context of power relations” (2017, p. 813), and posits that a structural analysis of poverty issues is coupled with the symbolic realm of relations of power and powerlessness (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Whereas representation starts by actually listening to and collaborating with people in poverty (Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2017), social work practitioners can play an important role in representing such an analysis of the disadvantaged or marginalised in the public debate (Krumer-Nevo, 2017). Through this, an in-depth insight into the actual realities and injustices of the lives of people in poverty and the measures to fight poverty might arise in the broader society. Krumer-Nevo (2009) states that if people in poverty are to be really considered as actual partners in the poverty debate, it is essential that their ideas and perspectives are considered as ‘knowledge’ rather than as merely ‘voice’. Whereas the notion of ‘voice’ entails the danger of dismissing the life knowledge of people in poverty as anecdotal, personal, subjective and emotional, valuing and embracing the insights of people in poverty as ‘knowledge’ implies that these people are not only respected as experts of their own private troubles and lived experiences, but also as “fully-fledged citizens [who have] valuable knowledge in respect to inequality, in respect to policy, social institutions and structures” (Krumer-Nevo, 2017, p. 817). The role of people in poverty and facilitators might enable and support this transition from ‘voice’ to ‘knowledge’, and acknowledge that people in poverty

“do not have only personal experiences but they also have thoughts, sometimes critical ones, ideas and recommendations, and they are capable of analyzing and theorizing their situations, even if they do it in nonacademic language” (Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 291).

As such, including the knowledge of people in poverty into public debate while recognising this knowledge as being on a par with other knowledge entails the opportunity of ‘croisement des savoirs’ (ATD Fourth World) or the merging of knowledge of people in poverty with that of practitioners, and also with the existing body of knowledge of researchers, policy makers, service providers, and actors in the wider society. This might constitute a pertinent challenge to practice and policy, as it “enables people living in poverty to fully exercise their citizenship, blurs the pejorative attitude toward ‘the poor’ as opposed to the non-poor, challenges Othering, and has the potential to fuel publicity campaigns and the activism of social movements” (Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 281).

6.3 Research objectives

In the engagement of social work towards the fight against poverty, the potential role of social work practice is embedded in the process of confronting and merging knowledge of people in poverty with the knowledge of other stakeholders (Krumer-Nevo, 2008, 2009, 2017). This can be achieved by representing the experiences of injustice of people in poverty and their perspectives, ideas and analysis on issues of poverty and injustice into the public debate. If the different perspectives are considered as being on a par with one another, such a politics of representation enables possibilities for hegemonic and oppositional knowledge of social realities to interact (Fraser, 1989; Krumer-Nevo, 2009), potentially changing the existing power relationships and transforming the status quo in society (Boone *et al.*, 2018b; Fraser, 1995, 2005). Despite the importance of such a conceptual framework, there is a lack of empirical insight into the daily reality of and complexity for social work practices and social practitioners who try to engage in such participatory ventures and into the direct participation of people in poverty in such ventures. For that reason, we discuss the empirical findings of a current qualitative research project in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) on Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice. The main objective of the project is to analyse the complexity of the direct participation of people in poverty in a representational politics aimed at effectuating policy and societal change, and consequently to discuss the different ways in which social work practitioners can relate to this complexity.

6.4 Methodology

6.4.1 Research context

Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice [APRVs] represent specific social work practices in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) and Brussels (the capital city of Belgium). Those organizations, 59 in total, aim to combat poverty in partnership with people with poverty-experience. More specifically, they are subsidised by the government (Poverty Decree, 2003) on the basis of six criteria: 1) continuously seek out new people in poverty, 2) enable people in poverty to unite, 3) give voice to people in poverty, 4) work towards their social emancipation, 5) change social structures, and 6) create dialogue and training activities to enhance the solidarity of people in poverty and the non-poor. APRVs generally partially work on a voluntary basis, mostly being supported by a combination of people with and without poverty-experience, but nevertheless in almost all APRVs, one or more social work practitioners are on the payroll to take the overall responsibility of fulfilling these criteria.

In their overall mission statement (Network against Poverty, n.d.), poverty is framed as a social injustice and a responsibility of the whole society. The mission statement asserts that the possibilities for everybody to participate on a par are not fulfilled and people in poverty are structurally excluded from society, and therefore the transformation of this society is necessary towards parity of participation for all. APRVs as such are not positioned in the field of individual casework, but are organisations which bring individuals together in a group, to collectively dialogue about their poverty-experiences and reflect on how to represent these experiences in society in order to bring social change. Rather than one specific way, APRVs find inspiration in different strategies to do so: policy-meetings, representing a testimony in the parliament, organising debate, training sessions about the causes of poverty, press-actions surrounding specific themes, demonstrating, ... Since the basic premise of participation is believed to be important, people in poverty are often directly involved in strategies to represent their perspectives, ideas and knowledge about living in poverty and about the poverty-problem in general. As such, these organisations provide a relevant case study to dig deeper in the complexity of the direct participation of people in poverty in processes that ambition for social policy and societal change and in the different roles practitioners can take on while engaging in this complexity.

6.4.2 Strategies of data collection and data analysis

In the context of a larger research project, five APRVs were selected and researched between September 2015 and June 2017. These organizations provide a differentiated sample of the 59 APRVs on the basis of following features: 1) their location in the different provinces of Flanders and diversity in terms of urban and rural environments of the APRVs, 2) their origins, 3) the number of paid workers, 4) the people they aim to reach, and 5) the sort of activities they conduct.

At the beginning of this study, all participants were informed about the objectives of the research, and it was explained that the collected data would be used for a general analysis, in which individual anonymity of particular organisations or respondents was guaranteed. All participants gave their formal consent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The research in those five APRVs consisted of two separate yet interrelated phases, based on a combination of participant observations and in-depth qualitative interviews.

First, to fully engage with the research field and acquire insight into the different strategies and the complexity of the work of APRVs: participant observations (Howitt, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011) were conducted (n=80) in very differentiated activities in those organizations. The researcher (the first author of this article) specifically focused on activities that aimed to bring people together in the light of substantial work (n= 34) and through activities aimed at influencing the public debate (n=26). Most of these activities had a duration of approximately two to three hours, in which the researcher always made her identity known and took on the role of observer while participating to some extent in the activities. The researcher made field notes about these observations which were recorded in a logbook, structured as observations and interpretation sections (Van Hove & Claes, 2011).

With the aim of deepening the understanding of the participant observations, a phase of the study took place in which the researcher conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with people linked to the five organisations. On the one hand, fourteen group interviews took place with different groups: participants (n=10 – total of 34 respondents), volunteers (n=2 – total of nine respondents) and policy makers (n=2 – total of six respondents). The interviews with the latter group were conducted in those organisations in which a deep collaboration between policy makers and the respective APRV was apparent. On the other hand, thirteen individual interviews with practitioners about their specific ways of

acting (n=13) were conducted. The interviews encompassed general questions about the complexities of representing knowledge into the public debate and the place of people in poverty in this representation, but our observations also enabled more acuminate and in-depth questions for each organisation/respondent concerning these topics. All interviews, ranging from one to two hours, were audio-recorded and fully transcribed (Howitt, 2010).

After completing these two stages, the data generated in the observations and interviews were analysed on the basis of a 'directed approach to qualitative content analysis' in order to make sense of all the information (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After unravelling a broad range of nodes concerning the direct representation of people in poverty and the role of practitioners in dealing with those complexities, the core ideas of our conceptual framework inspired the analysis of our data and enabled us to identify the core themes emerging from the data (Patton, 2002). Finally, these findings were presented in two focus groups (Van Hove & Claes, 2011) with practitioners from other APRVs (n=13 respondents), in order to discuss some findings and uncover potential gaps.

6.5 Findings

From our findings, two main themes are discussed: 1) the complexity of merging knowledge in the fight for social change; and 2) the role of social workers in dealing with the complexities of the direct representation of people in poverty in processes of policy and societal change.

6.5.1 The complexity of merging knowledge in the fight for social change

The transformative potential of merging ideas and perspectives of different stakeholders with the experiences and knowledge of people in poverty is a core conviction in the engagement of APRVs in their attempt to shape 'a politics of representation'. Ideally, people in poverty themselves represent their knowledge, since both practitioners and participants believe that bringing the "authenticity of life stories" and "complexity of living in poverty" to the foreground might stimulate policy and societal change.

Such change already starts through daily practice of APRVs, as practitioners and volunteers often articulate their increasing insight into the problem of poverty through a direct exchange with participants. With a broader societal ambition in

mind, APRVs consider it important that knowledge is represented into public debate which sheds light on the root causes and collective nature of poverty. In APRVs, the collective interchange of individual experiences of people in poverty is therefore often organised in a way in which the collective, structural and unjust nature of these experiences are discussed. Ideally, this enables all participants to frame their individual experiences in a collective light and represent such a standpoint into public debate (Boone *et al.*, 2018b).

Nevertheless, our analysis reveals the complexity of this ideal, in line with what Krumer-Nevo (2009) asks in relation to understanding the objective of the participation of people in poverty: “Do we want to achieve an empowering experience for the participants? Or to change the views of the policy makers, social practitioners, and researchers on the social services and on people in poverty?” (p. 291). In that vein, our findings uncover two critical considerations when people in poverty directly participate in the representation of their knowledge, relating to the question whether individual voice or collective knowledge is represented, and the question of whether knowledge is represented on a par.

6.5.2 Representing voice or collective knowledge?

Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010) posed that the “public airing of voices of people in poverty is insufficient”, since voice “may echo hegemonic discourses supporting Othering” (p. 705) as people in poverty may have internalised their oppression (Freire, 1970). Although social practitioners in APRVs invest in collective group-processes (Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b) by which the “voices of the participants, their lived experiences and private troubles [might be] transformed into knowledge” (Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 291), our findings nevertheless suggest that it is difficult to fully realise such an objective while stepping into public debate together with people in poverty.

First of all, critical considerations can sometimes be made about what kind of experiences and knowledge are brought into play and by whom. In some organisations or activities, the emotional distress and psychological consequences of poverty are emphasised and brought into public debate by people in poverty when stepping outside. Despite the importance of revealing such ‘voices’, the danger is that it leads to focusing on strategies to ‘cope with such distress’, rather than on the transformation of society. An observation made in an APRV that created on its own initiative a sensitising game-board to play with policy makers or service-providers, makes this tangible:

While playing the game, one person with poverty-experience is always the ringmaster, and brings his/her own life knowledge in during the game. At a certain point, one of the cards in the game positions: 'rich people are happier than people in poverty'. Some people seem to disagree, while others nod and express that this is probably the case ... The ringmaster very firmly denies this statement, stating that poverty does not imply that you are not happy and you have the same value when you are poor and money is not everything in life. The conversation on that topic then stops and the game goes on. (Observation Org.5)

As a researcher - I was an observer at that time so I did not take part in the discussion, but it did enable me to make an estimation about why the conversation about that specific issue stopped at that point. It appeared as if there was a barrier between the players of the game to bring in and discuss opposing views from a sense that this would be interpreted by the ringmaster (hence the person in poverty at the table) as a misrecognition of his equal worth and dignity. While it might be perfectly understandable why a person who has been misrecognised his whole life would want to stress such a message into public debate, it does however also point out real danger. Here the voicing of such firm messages brings the moral worth of people in poverty to the foreground but also discredits any meaningful conversation about the distribution of resources and material deprivation in the conversation.

Secondly, while some people in poverty were very articulate in expressing a connection between lived experiences and the unjust nature of poverty, our observations revealed that these people were often participants who had already run through a long process in their organisation, while a lot of other participants remained in the background when engaging in a politics of representation. For instance, an observation of a local consultation on education organised by local policy in which different stakeholders participated (service providers, policy makers, civil society organizations) in small and diverse groups, exemplifies this.

The meeting was substantially prepared in advance by the person in poverty and the practitioner. In this preparation they had an exchange about what the person in poverty would want to stress out in public debate. Nevertheless, at the actual consultation itself, the person in poverty was very quiet, only spoke when she was addressed directly, and even then gave short and non-coherent answers. The practitioner tried to hint at the preparation and gave some possible ideas on measures on education, while afterwards looking at the person in poverty and addressing her

experience directly: 'yes, you have experience and ideas about that I think?', but the person did not elaborate on it. (Observation Org.1)

Such an example does not stand on its own, since a lot of observations (policy-meetings, but also training activities initiated by the APRVs, network meetings, a public activity in the light of the annual resistance against poverty) revealed that – while often collaboratively prepared – some participants with poverty-experience remained on the background or brought a hesitant or non-coherent story.

However, it is necessary to be conscious that such observations do not necessarily uncover differences of participants' inherent capacities to reflect critically on their circumstances and experiences. Yet, it might reveal more the discrepancy between the inherent knowledge people in poverty have and the manner in which such knowledge can be brought into play in this variety of activities. In such activities people in poverty are often expected or feel pressured to participate and communicate on the terms of the powerful. They are for instance expected and pressured to be actively participating and verbal participants in such activities, always ready to bring in their own experiences concerning one specific subject. Such pressure of conformity to the rules of the powerful seemed especially the case in those strategies in which people in poverty in some shape or form sat around the table or were involved in dialogue with policy- or other actors who have power to effectuate change. While APRVs do not only engage in such activities for social change (we have already given examples of other activities), it is however a much implemented or used strategy by a lot of APRVs. Digging deeper in such strategies therefore leads us to the next consideration.

6.5.2.1 Representing knowledge on a par?

While merging knowledge with stakeholders in society, Krumer-Nevo (2008) points out that there is a luring danger that "the voices and knowledges of poor people are perceived by policy makers (...) as anecdotal, providing items to be used when introducing an article or lecture, but not as a source of knowledge necessary for the setting of policy or for the refinement of intervention methods" (p. 556). Therefore, a vital issue which is at stake in a 'politics of representation', is "the fashioning of the discourse to become not merely formally inclusive but truly and deeply so" (Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 292) in which people in poverty are considered to be "knowledgeable" and their life knowledge is considered to be on a par with other knowledge (ibid, p. 291). Since a lot of our observations

involved the direct participation of people in poverty in dialogue with policy makers or other service providers, our research made it possible to raise some critical – and paradoxical - considerations as to whether the direct participation of people in poverty in such processes contributes to this ambition of participatory parity in society.

First, our findings show that often APRVs are to some extent acknowledged as a local communication partner or a necessary 'voice' in local social policy and sometimes have a very productive relationship with local policy makers and service providers. For instance, some APRVs had strong bonds with local policy makers, were involved as structural partners in the development of local poverty policy, got subsidised by local government institutions (additionally on the subsidy from the Poverty Decree) to expand their work and so on ... Nevertheless, some observations reveal the danger that the input of people in poverty serves rather instrumental purposes. For example, when policy makers ask practitioners in APRVs to check what their participants think about a certain point so that they can underscore it as evaluated by people in poverty, or the danger that people in poverty might be formally acknowledged as partners on a par but are in reality not always recognised as such by all stakeholders. Such complexities were illustrated by an observation made in a steering group, in which policy makers, service providers and private social organisations discussed local social policy on a frequent basis. As background it is important to know that the practitioner of this APRV spent a lot of time and effort guaranteeing that people in poverty, connected to the different organisational members of the meeting, could become structural partners in the gathering, although only participants of APRV seemed to attend the meetings.

The discussion in this particular meeting is about how the future social grocery should be organised to benefit people in poverty. While four people with poverty-experience are present, a social worker from another organisation asks the practitioner of the APRV: 'What do you think that people in poverty regard as the best hours?'. The practitioner answers: 'They are sitting around the table, so maybe we should ask them directly?' (Observation Org.4)

Our findings also suggest that there are implications for the aim of achieving societal change when people get emotional, angry, overwhelmed or confused during their encounters with external actors.

An observation reflects this, showing an occasion in which a woman got very upset in a meeting in parliament while discussing her knowledge on accessibility issues concerning vacations for people with low incomes. During the question round, a member of parliament complimented the woman for being so strong and said: 'I was touched by your words', without addressing the substance of what she said. (Observation Org.5)

Whilst practitioners in APRVs, of course, cannot fully control how the participation of people in poverty is conceptualised by others or what messages come across, this suggests that it is still vital to consider how society conceives the idea of merging knowledge of people in poverty with other stakeholders. If society deals instrumentally with the knowledge of people in poverty and processes their input in a selective way, an idea of the imparity of people in poverty may be strengthened, where not all people in poverty are considered to be partners on a par with valuable and unique knowledge and insights on the issue of poverty. Consequently, "ultimately it may be the nature of democracy rather than the identity of participating service users which is up for discussion" (Beresford & Campbell, 1994, p. 316).

6.5.3 The vital role of practitioners in dealing with these complexities

In the first part of our analysis, we addressed the complexity of trying to merge the life knowledge of people in poverty with the knowledge of other stakeholders in society, in which considerations were addressed in relation to the question of whether participatory representativeness or the direct participation of people in poverty always contributed to the goal of social change. In this regard, it is often stated that practitioners in APRVs have an important role in such a politics of representation by collaborating with and supporting people in poverty to represent knowledge on poverty in society. This is summarised by one respondent:

I think the big change will come from people in poverty. But with support from us (...) Yes, giving people voice, the voice they already have, but we support them in ways to represent it to the outside world. (Interview Org.2b)

In the second part of our empirical analysis, we will therefore discuss how social practitioners conceive this role, while making reference to 'the practitioner who

acts as a guardian of collective and transformative elements', and to 'the practitioner who acts as a strategic chess player'.

6.5.3.1 The practitioner as a guardian of collective and transformative elements

While some people in poverty firmly articulate a collective and structural perspective on poverty in public debate, the complexity for participants to verbalise the connection between their own experiences and the collective and unjust nature of poverty has already been discussed. Krumer-Nevo (2008) emphasises that many people with poverty experience have often had a rough past, were not able to enjoy a good education, and often are justly angry or alienated, possibly causing them to "speak in a way which sounds like noise, inarticulate and chaotic" (p. 563). Therefore, she suggests that a potential role of social workers is "to join people in poverty in their struggle in order to make it more successful" (Krumer-Nevo, 2017, p. 9).

A lot of our findings relate with this plea, since often practitioners in APRVs conceive their own specific role as continuously 'keeping an eye on the more collective and structural aspects of poverty' while stepping into the limelight together with people in poverty. This starts by making sure that the collective message about poverty is addressed in daily practice. One practitioner explained, for example, why they substantially prepared what was going to happen with the group before engaging in a politics of representation:

We (practitioners) guard that our substance stays strong. If you don't prepare it collectively, you run the risk that everybody tells their personal story. The structural fight against poverty goes beyond those personal stories. It is showing the collectiveness in all those stories and connect these with policy makers and with services. Otherwise, you run the danger that policy gets away with it by providing individual solutions to a collective problem. (Interview Org.1a)

The 'guarding role' of practitioners remains vital while collaboratively stepping into the public debate, as illustrated by the following observation of a meeting with local policy makers about renewing membership for the social grocery.

After people in poverty expressed frustrations that they have to renew their membership too often, and that it is unclear when to do so, the practitioner suggests to the policy makers to do this annually. A worker from the general welfare centre says that this term is far too long enabling fraud in

that period because people might already have found a job and no longer be entitled for food help. The practitioner responds: 'having a job for a few months does not imply that people are out of poverty, it might be good that they can benefit from some prolonged support. (Observation Org.1)

As such, our observations reveal that practitioners often made sure that transformative elements were represented in the public debate. This is summarised beautifully by one practitioner:

My role is framing a personal experience brought by a person with poverty-experience (...) maybe the broader poverty-story. Showing to the outside world that it is not only the experience of person X, but we have a number of people who experience similar stories or share the same vision. I can make it broader. (Interview Org.4a)

What shines through in the conception of the role of practitioners as guardians of collective and transformative elements, is that the premise of the direct participation of people in poverty while stepping into the public debate stand central, not only or predominantly from a belief that this is the best strategy to effectuate societal change, but often first and foremost from the strengthening or empowering experience this can give to people. However, our findings also reveal that some practitioners in general or in some specific occasions adopt a more 'relativistic attitude' towards the premise of the direct participation of people in poverty.

6.5.3.2 The practitioner as a strategical chess-player

In concordance with the plea of Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010) for researchers in poverty work to "become more conscious and sophisticated players in the arena of the politics of representation" (p. 708), the same could be argued for practitioners in anti-poverty work (Krumer-Nevo, 2017), as "social workers [should be] society's delegates in the antipoverty work" (Krumer-Nevo, 2008, p. 563). With regard to such beliefs, some practitioners in APRVs argue that it is sometimes necessary to "step outside the box" in order to fulfil actual societal change. One practitioner working with persons without a legal citizenship explained:

I don't believe in traditional representation-politics. (...) Practitioners do not believe in dialogue anymore, since we learned that all doors are closed. The group would be glad if we said that we wanted to have a formal meeting with the office for foreign affairs, but we know that it won't change

anything. So, you need other strategies of some kind. Pressure on the political level, influencing the way of thinking in society... (Interview Org.2a)

In search of such alternative strategies, practitioners sometimes emphasise the importance of representing a vision of a more just society into the debate. For instance, a lot of APRVs choose to involve volunteers without poverty-experience in the shaping of practice. While these volunteers may merely offer practical support, such choice is sometimes framed in a strategy of creating “miniature societies” in which those volunteers learn about poverty by exchanging with people in poverty in daily practice, and then bring those insights into society, for instance, by challenging stereotypical ways of thinking in their social network. Next to this small demarcated input by volunteers, practitioners can also actively invest in ‘sensitising the wider society’ about such solidarity or as discussed in a focus group:

You create solidarity and communality by giving people insight in each other's life worlds, that it doesn't matter if he is rich or poor, what kind of ethnicity, job or not ... And then you collaboratively should bring this outside in a project of some kind ...

‘Yes, we had a show-off of a collaborative project of people with and without poverty-experience and we succeeded in getting model citizens there while representing the message that poverty is a communal responsibility. As such we create solidarity by injecting the idea: why might it not happen to you?’ (Focus Group practitioners 2, exchange between respondent b and f)

From the same ‘out-of-the-box-thinking’ and with the aim of societal change in mind, it is important to see that the basic premise of participation of people in poverty sometimes appears to be strategically balanced by APRVs themselves. On the one hand, the direct participation of people in poverty is sometimes deliberately and even instrumentally used to stimulate societal change, for instance to “play the emotional card”, bringing a large number of people for the “power of the number”, or using testimonials to influence public opinion. On the other hand, sometimes the opposite choice is made in which practitioners operate ‘solo’, without the direct participation of people in poverty, for instance when practitioners notice that the participation of people in poverty merely serves “window-dressing”. Here practitioners argue that they have “a mandate to speak”

for people in poverty from the APRVs, while using their experiences and perspectives as a guide.

Therefore, an important attribution made by some practitioners – and somewhat opposed to the role of practitioners as a guardian of collective and transformative elements - is that the direct participation of people in poverty in representing knowledge of poverty should not always be the core objective, but should be considered in the light of what brings about societal change. Here it is stated that practitioners in APRVs might be essential in continuously reconsidering what strategies seem a best fit for the people involved but also and maybe more importantly in order to transform society. Practitioners who take a more 'relativistic attitude' towards the direct participation of people in poverty, state that they should make strategic choices, in which they should constantly think out of the box, balancing the goal of empowering people in poverty with the goal of transforming society, reflecting on the position of participation and what change is necessary so people in poverty really are on a par in those processes. To say it in the words of a practitioner:

The most important core brand of a practitioner is that he can play chess. You have to be a master-strategist, be friends with everybody, continuously thinking, getting new insights ... You have to know what your people want, that people can grow, that they can participate, but also think ahead ... (Focus Group practitioners 2, Rb)

6.6 Concluding reflections

While dealing with the complexities of the direct participation of people in representational politics aimed at effectuating policy and societal change, we have revealed that some practitioners seem to swear by this direct participation and take on a guardian role to make sure that the structural and collective message is brought into debate. Others practitioners however take on a more relativistic attitude towards this direct participation from the get-go, and argue that practitioners should become 'chess players' in order to achieve societal change.

By concluding our empirical analysis with the plea of some practitioners to be chess players, it might appear to the reader that we dismiss the participation of people in poverty in the representation of knowledge in the fight against poverty, but in no shape or form do we want to do so. On the contrary, starting from the

social justice theory of Nancy Fraser, a society is only just when there is parity of participation. Thus, continuous attempts – especially from social work and practitioners – should be made to transform social policy and the broader society towards more participatory parity. But as Thompson (2009) has mentioned, “it is not always the case that more democracy leads to more justice, until democratic justice is fully achieved” (p. 1080). Therefore, we do believe that our research contribution can be situated in how it opens the discussion again by approaching participatory ventures in an attempt to change society very critically (Beresford, 2002; Cowden & Singh, 2007). As Loughlin (in Smith *et al.*, 2012) has argued, “few would disagree that user participation and engagement in social work are ‘a good thing’. (...). Buzzwords, nonetheless, carry some weight. They are utilised, (...) to control and manipulate working populations and to ‘manage the perceptions’ of the public at large” (p. 1473). Therefore, the most essential consideration might not be what stories should be represented or who tells and frames them best. When adopting a radical claim that only people in poverty can directly represent individual and collective knowledge, we have exemplified that the former does paradoxically not necessarily result in the desired effect of transforming society towards more participatory parity. Hence, we embrace the plea that social practitioners should first be able to place a participatory discourse into perspective, and estimate the extent to which the participation of people in poverty can contribute to the ambition of the merging of knowledge between practitioners, policy makers and people in poverty in order to achieve more participatory parity. This requires practitioners who dare to reflect openly on the surplus value of the direct participation of people in poverty to bring knowledge into society, since this sometimes appears to serve an individual empowering goal rather than believing that this participation will change something. Consequently, the radical – or ‘dogmatic’ or ‘tyrannising’ - claim that people in poverty are the only ones who can represent and merge knowledge with other powerful stakeholders in society sometimes even turns out to be counterproductive. It requires an evaluation as to whether policy regards people in poverty as partners on a par:

Rather than allowing this to become another item for managers to tick off, front-line staff should reclaim the agenda of critical practice and argue for this, not just as a vehicle for social inclusion, but most critically, in the longer term, as a means by which new insights into power and powerlessness can be gained and new emancipatory policies constructed. (Cowden & Singh, 2007, p. 21)

Nevertheless, we object to the idea that the power of making these strategic choices can be positioned exclusively in the hands of the practitioners, which seems to be suggested by Calleja and Marantz (2015): “Only practitioners know when challenges would be well supported through citizen engagement. It is up to practitioners to decide when to work alone, and when and how to engage citizens in the policy-making process” (p. 9). On the contrary, from the social justice ideal of parity of participation, these strategic considerations in social work practice should be brought in conversation with people in poverty, where an open discussion can be held about what sort of message is brought to society, who brings it and in what manner. In that sense, practitioners are not ‘knowers’ but become ‘learners’, and their own knowledge and skills are used “in order to become full partners with our clients and together to find appropriate ways for them to get the help that they need” (Krumer-Nevo, 2008, p. 562). From such a stance, these forums open up possibilities for a deeper understanding on what it means to be living in poverty, and in respect of merged knowledge, how transformation of social policy and broader society can be achieved toward greater justice and participatory parity.

6.7 References

- Askheim, O.P., Christensen, K., Fluge, S., & Guldvik, I. (2017). User participation in the Norwegian welfare context: An analysis of policy discourses. *Journal of Social Policy*, 46, 583–601.
- ATD Fourth World. (n.d.). *Merging knowledge*. Retrieved from <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/what-we-do/participation/merging-knowledge/>
- Beresford, P. (2002). User involvement in research and evaluation: Liberation or regulation? *Social Policy and Society*, 1(2), 95–105.
- Beresford, P. (2010). Public partnerships, governance and user involvement: a service user perspective. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34, 495–502.
- Beresford, P., & Campbell, J. (1994). Disabled people, service users, user involvement and representation. *Disability & Society*, 9(3), 315–325.
- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (1995). It's our problem too! Challenging the exclusion of poor people from poverty discourse. *Critical Social Policy*, 15(75), 75–95.

- Beresford, P., & Croft, S. (2004). Service users and practitioners reunited. The key component for social work reform. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34(1), 53–68.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018a). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018b). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789
- Calleja, R., & Marantz, U. (2015). *A contribution to the NS initiative. Co-creation and co-production: Towards a practical approach*. Retrieved from http://www.pgionline.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/NS_Co-Production_March-21_Ebook-v3-1.pdf
- Cook, D. (2002). Consultation, for a change? Engaging users and communities in the policy process. *Social Policy & Administration*, 36(5), 516–531.
- Cook, B., & Kothari, U. (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* New York: Zed Books.
- Cools, P., Leggio, D.L., Matras, Y., & Oosterlynck, S. (2017). 'Parity of Participation' and the politics of needs interpretation: Engagement with Roma migrants in Manchester. *Journal of Social Policy*. Advance Access published 25 July 2017. doi: 10.1017/S0047279417000575
- Cornwall, A., & Brock, K. (2005). What do buzzwords do for development policy? A critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(7), 1043–1060.
- Cowden, S., & Singh, G. (2007). The 'user': Friend, foe or fetish? A critical exploration of user involvement in health and social care. *Critical Social Policy*, 27(1), 5–23.

- Davies, K., Gray, M., & Webb, S. (2014). Putting the parity into service-user participation. An integrated model of social justice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 119–127.
- Dean, H. (2013). The translation of needs into rights: Reconceptualising social citizenship as a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(S1), 32–49.
- De Bie, M., Roets, G., Roose, R., & Versailles P. (2013). Armoedebestrijding als democratisch vraagstuk. In W. Lahaye, I. Pannecoucke, J. Vranken & R. Van Rossem (Eds.), *Armoede in België 2013: Jaarboek 2013* (pp. 181–199). Leuven: Acco.
- De Corte, J., Roose, R., Bradt, L., & Roets, G. (2018). Service users with experience of poverty as institutional entrepreneurs in public services in Belgium: An institutional theory perspective on policy implementation. *Social Policy & Administration*, 52(1), 197–215.
- Flemish Government (2003) *Decreet betreffende de armoedebestrijding*. Retrieved from http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=2003032143&table_name=wet (accessed 10/10/2017).
- Fraser, N. (1989). Talking about needs: Interpretative contests as political conflicts in welfare-state societies. *Ethics*, 99(2), 291–313.
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere. A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, 25/26, 56–80.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition. Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Fraser, N. (2008). Abnormal justice. *Critical Inquiry*, 34(3), 393–422.

- Fraser, N. (2010). Injustice at intersecting scales. On “social exclusion” and the “global poor”. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 13(3), 363–371.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Gates, A.B. (2017). “No one will speak for us”. Empowering undocumented immigrant women through policy advocacy. *Journal of Community Practice*, 25(1), 5–28.
- Hickey, S., & Bracking, S. (2005). Exploring the politics of chronic poverty. From representation to a politics of justice? *World Development*, 33(6), 851–865.
- Howitt, D. (2010). *Introduction to qualitative methods in psychology*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288.
- Juhila, K. (2008). Forms of advocacy in social welfare work with homeless women. *European Journal of Social Work*, 11(3), 267–278.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2005). Listening to ‘life knowledge’: A new research direction in poverty studies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 99–106.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2008). From ‘noise’ to ‘voice’: How social work can benefit from knowledge of people living in poverty. *International Social Work*, 51(4), 556–65.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2009). From voice to knowledge: participatory action research, inclusive debate and feminism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(3), 279–295.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty and the political: Wresting the political out of and into social work theory, research and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(6), 811–822.

- Krumer-Nevo, M., & Benjamin, O. (2010). Critical poverty knowledge. Contesting othering and social distancing. *Current Sociology*, 58(5), 693–714.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lorenz, W. (2014). *The need for a new social question*. Public lecture given at Ghent University on 20th March 2014.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social practitioners as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Hickey, S. & Mohan, G. (2004). *Participation: From tyranny to transformation*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Mosley, J. (2013). Recognizing new opportunities. Reconceptualizing policy advocacy in everyday organizational practice. *Social Work*, 58(3), 231–239.
- Network against Poverty. (n.d.). *Gewoon mens mogen zijn!* Retrieved from <http://netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Visietekst-Vlaams-Netwerk.pdf>
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Postle, K., & Beresford, P. (2007). Capacity building and the reconception of political participation. A role for social care workers? *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(1), 143–158.
- Prior, D., & Barnes, M. (2011). Subverting social policy on the front line: Agencies of resistance in the delivery services. *Social Policy & Administration*, 45(3), 264–279.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or Pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy & Administration*, 46(7), 807–822.
- Smith, M., Gallagher, M., Wosu, H., Stewart, J., Cree, V.E., Hunter, S., Evans, S. *et. al* (2012). Engaging with involuntary service users in social work. Findings from a knowledge exchange project. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1460–1477.

- Stepney, P. (2006). Mission impossible? Critical practice in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(8), 1289–1307.
- Thompson, S. (2009). On the circularity of democratic justice. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 35(9), 1079–1098.
- Van Hove, G., & Claes, L. (2011). *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Weiss-Gal, I., & Gal, J. (2014). Social workers as policy actors. *Journal of Social Policy*, 43(1), 19–36.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.1 Research concerning a pedagogy of combatting poverty: areas of choice

The first chapter of this dissertation highlighted the proposition that poverty is not a neutral but a normative construct (Lister, 2004; Mestrum, 2011). In a similar vein, social work research regarding poverty is not a neutral enterprise, but should be considered a highly ‘political activity’ (Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Mehta, 2008), as it “intervenes in existing assumptions about social problems” (Roose *et al.*, 2016, p. 2). This political activity also implies that the researcher is confronted with areas of choice throughout the research process (Roose *et al.*, 2016), in which the researcher needs to position him/herself in relation to questions of how to conceive the problem of poverty and what sort of questions will be asked, how and to what extent research participants are active co-designers of the research and how to interpret and represent findings throughout the research. Since a reflexive stance in poverty research is necessary (Schiettecat *et al.*, 2017), some of the major research choices that were made are connected to the grounds on which these choices were made, as well as to the complexity of committing to these choices.

7.1.1 Poverty as a structural participation problem

This dissertation had the ambition to reflect on how social work practitioners can shape a ‘pedagogy of combatting poverty’ in which the participation of people in poverty is taken to heart.

This focus came to light since social work is a profession committed to the fight against poverty (Payne, 2005; IFSW, 2014), but is caught in the complexity of where it should locate its own core focus (De Corte & Roose, 2018; Dowling, 1999; Geldof & Driessens, 2009; Hermans, 2012; Jordan, 2008; Lorenz, 2016, 2017; Pierson, 2016). Since social work cannot directly solve the structural causes of poverty, it might try to resolve the inherent complexity by conceiving its main goal as investing in care for people in poverty and in compensation for the problems they encounter, while attempting to support their societal integration (Davis & Wainwright, 2003; Jordan, 2008; Mullaly, 2007; Roose *et al.*, 2012; Van Ewijk, 2010). Here, the participation of people in poverty in and through social work might be little more than a means to achieve such integration. More critical responses to this complexity have re-emphasised social work’s engagement with social justice, in which the fight against structural causes of poverty should remain at the heart of the profession (Carey & Foster,

2011; Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lorenz, 2016). Although here, the participation of people in poverty is not merely a means for integration but is considered a basic condition for engaging in this fight, it is nevertheless not always clear how the quest for a critical and political stance in social work relates to the specific needs, concerns and aspirations for growth of individuals within contemporary society (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Hermans, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Millar, 2008; Roose *et al.*, 2012). As such, and as addressed in the first chapter, it was argued that the 'pedagogical perspective' on social work needs to be deepened (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Lorenz, 2016) in order to gain a deeper and more concrete understanding of how social work practice and social work practitioners can try and engage with the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate social justice and societal change.

As touched upon in the first chapter, a pedagogical perspective on social work first and foremost implies that social work practices are not neutral, but should be considered themselves as intentional educational interventions in the socialisation of individuals (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). While being committed to social justice, such a perspective in social work practices engaged in the fight against poverty thus not only entails a neutral question for practitioners on how they can 'do things right' in methodical ways, but starts with a value-loaded question or exercise of how practitioners can engage in continuous reflection on 'doing right things' (Biesta, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). In this reflection, the inherent complexity of trying to connect individual experiences, aspirations, needs and concerns to the broader socio-political level should not be ignored (Vandenbroeck, 2010, p. 149-150). From such a pedagogical perspective, the primary role for social work practice in the fight against poverty is therefore not about complying with the direct needs of people in poverty or about one-sidedly determining how people in poverty can be socialised into society, but about creating opportunities to reflect collaboratively on the different perspectives on what social justice might mean while making sure that the perspectives of people in poverty are included in the public debate (Biesta, 2014, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Freire, 1970, 1972; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). From such an understanding, we have stressed the importance of a pedagogical approach to social problems, such as poverty and social inequality, as a 'pedagogy of combatting poverty'.

In the same vein, the scientific study of how such a pedagogy can be developed is also not a neutral enterprise, but can be perceived as an attempt to remain

committed to stimulating reflection on how social work can relate to its ambition of fighting poverty and injustice. Such an engagement was reflected firstly in the research choice to conceive poverty as a 'structural participation problem', implying that people in poverty do not have sufficient resources, power and due recognition to be fully-fledged partners in the reflection on what poverty is and how to fight it (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Doom, 2003; Lister, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012). Poverty is thus considered as, in essence, a problem of unequal power relationships, in which people in poverty have a marginal and passive position in society, influenced by an interplay of social, economic and political components (Dean, 2013; Krumer-Nevo, 2016, 2017; Lister, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012). Such a conceptualisation of poverty clearly engages with a critical reading of the issue at hand and connects with a research agenda committed to the reflection on how social work can shape a pedagogy of combatting poverty, while taking the participation of people to heart and striving for social justice and social change.

7.1.2 A combination of critical theories and perspectives

In order to gain such an understanding, this research project had the ambition from the very beginning to deepen and connect theoretical and empirical insights into shaping such a pedagogy. While engaging in a case study of Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice, a 'retroductive approach' was therefore chosen to guide the whole process (Downward & Mearman, 2007; Emerson, 2004; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011), since such an approach gives recognition to the continuous and dynamic interplay of theoretical ideas and concepts with empirical knowledge. As outlined in the first chapter, this approach, for instance, enabled the researcher to formulate more directed research questions in the second research phase, based on the already gathered conceptual and empirical insights. The recognition of such a dynamic interplay as an inherent part of the research also made possible choices regarding the theoretical and conceptual perspectives and frameworks.

By committing to reflection on a pedagogy of combatting poverty and the conception of poverty as a structural participation problem, throughout the research process and the analysis of our data, connections were made with critical theories, ideas and perspectives committed to such conceptualisation and to this goal. As one of the ambitions was to unravel on a theoretical level how social work can deal with the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate societal change, inspiration for the conceptual framework of this

dissertation was found in the theory of social justice of Nancy Fraser (1989, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008).

Fraser is a critical theorist and a political philosopher, who in her reflection on and theory of social justice brings forward critical ideas on achieving social justice in contemporary times. These ideas have inspired some renowned scholars in their reflection on social work in engaging with social justice (see Davies, Gray, & Webb, 2014; Garrett, 2010; Gupta, 2017; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Lister, 2002, 2004, 2013; Webb, 2010, 2014), and have also inspired this research to engage critically with the role of social work in the fight against poverty. Fraser puts the quest for social justice at the core of her work and her theory connects to the conceptualisation of poverty as a structural participation problem. While not directly engaging with the problem of poverty, she does, however, introduce 'parity of participation' as the central theme in the envisioning of a socially just society, while framing the lack of parity as a problem due to interwoven obstacles in the cultural, economic and political domains (2005). As such, her theory enables researchers to shed light on the complex nature of poverty and thus on the complex enterprise of social work in trying to engage with people in poverty and in the fight against poverty (Garrett, 2010). Furthermore, by not only emphasising the three interimbricated domains of social justice, but also addressing the need to create 'counterpublics' (1989) as strategies to bring in the perspectives of subordinated groups and the two-way split of dealing in an 'affirmative' or 'transformative' manner with these obstacles (1995, 2005), inspiration was provided to reflecting on the complex engagement of social work practice towards its social justice aspirations (see Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b).

Nevertheless, Fraser's ideas are to be situated on a meta-theoretical level. While her set of ideas provided food for thought to reflect on the conceptualisation of the role of social work in the fight against poverty and on the complexities of participatory practices (chapters 2 and 3), they did not directly offer concrete points of reference for social work practices to actively attempt to engage in the complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate social justice and societal change. Through a continuous effort to connect theoretical and conceptual perspectives to our empirical fieldwork and vice versa, it became clear that the work of Fraser and our conceptual derivations from it needed to be connected to other sources of inspiration in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of how practitioners try to engage and actively build strategies while dealing with all this complexity. For instance, Fraser's social justice theory did not provide ideas on how social

practitioners could engage in the complexity of centralising the participation of people in poverty in the fight against poverty if people themselves do not feel the need to participate (see, for instance, chapter 5). Or while Fraser argues for transformation on a societal level (1995), and this could well be vital advice for social policy makers, the pedagogical work of practitioners appeared, in the search for (affirmative) strategies, to combine the needs and concerns of people in poverty to find immediate relief and a place in society with continuous engagement in and struggle for the fight against poverty.

To give recognition to this search and active engagement in all these complexities of shaping social work practices, the ideas of Fraser were combined with other critical ideas and theories of social work scholars and pedagogues throughout this dissertation. This enabled us to give language to, and to analyse what is actually happening in, practice and how practitioners can engage in their daily interactions with people in poverty as well as with different stakeholders in society. This is done, for instance, by drawing on the ideas concerning a pedagogy of the oppressed of Paulo Freire, which to this day still provides a meaningful critical pedagogical framework for reflecting on how to engage with issues of poverty (chapter 5), but also by finding inspiration in the ideas of some critical social work scholars (chapters 4 and 6) or by connecting critically to some relevant concepts for social work practice, such as enabling niches (chapter 4). Here, the same argument as for choosing the ideas of Fraser could be repeated in the selection of these conceptual ideas and perspectives: all propose a critical and social justice agenda, and give recognition to the complexity of the role of social work in social problems such as poverty while stressing the need to acknowledge the participation of people in poverty in reflecting on this issue. While the choices to connect with these critical theories and perspectives are made deliberately as they offer points of reference to connect a critical theoretical agenda with the actual daily reality of the work of APRVs, they should be regarded not as the only ones possible, but as 'reflexive tools' to give language to the enterprise of shaping participatory practices that aim for social change and as perspectives that give incentives for ongoing reflection on how social work can be engaged in a pedagogy of combatting poverty.

7.1.3 Participatory research in all its complexity

Committing to research on a pedagogy of combatting poverty in which participation is taken to heart also implied the need to engage with the issue of participation of research subjects in the research. From a belief that issues of poverty can only be fully understood when theoretical knowledge is merged with

practical and life knowledge (Krumer-Nevo, 2009; Roose *et al.*, 2016; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2014), a participatory research approach was considered to be vital from the beginning of the research, in which the research team attempted to create openness to collaboratively discussing and reflecting on the research questions, methodology and preliminary findings. This was also translated into the creation of some more formal opportunities to enable exchange between those different parties, for instance by establishing a steering group and daily committee. Nevertheless, from an awareness that such formal channels only reach a small representation of delegates, efforts were also made throughout the research to stimulate discussion on other ways, for instance by discussing some of the preliminary findings in discussion groups or by discussing pathways with related practitioners, but also by treating informal meetings (breaks in meetings, after talks) as moments to reflect on the research with volunteers and participants. However, this participatory commitment still proved to be challenging on different levels.

As we briefly explained in the first chapter, the research was initiated on the basis of a question from the Network against Poverty, which – a decade after its acknowledgment in the Poverty Decree of 2003 – primarily were in need for a deepened insight into what Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice do, and especially wanted to know what the meaning of that work was for the growth and empowerment of people in poverty. While dialoguing about this question with the Network against Poverty (and later with the steering committee), the researcher's perspective was that such a question should be framed within an analysis of how APRVs could shape the complex relationship between working with individuals in need and working towards societal change. As such, throughout the research process choices were made in favour of theoretical perspectives (for instance, the work of Nancy Fraser) and specific research focuses (for instance, the analysis of participation that became even more central in the second study) that connected to the question of how to engage in this complex interplay. While these choices were presented and discussed throughout the research process, it remains important, however, to engage in collaborative reflection on how this research connects with the initial question and aspiration of the Network against Poverty and on what sort of contribution it might make (or not make) for APRV-practitioners to shape their work. For instance, there are plans to write a book and attempts will be made to discuss the findings of the research with practitioners in numerous fields.

Throughout the research process, it also appeared that the conceptualisations of what the participation of different parties implied for the research were not

always in sync with one another. This was especially the case in the conceptualisation of what the participation of people in poverty should imply during the research process (Roose *et al.*, 2016). Taking the research topic to heart – reflecting on the role of social work and its practitioners in creating a pedagogy of combatting poverty – the researcher considered the participation of people in poverty throughout the research important in order to get a better sense of their perspectives on such a pedagogy. From a researcher's point of view, we wanted to avoid the participation of people in poverty in the research becoming a dogmatic or instrumental way of gathering input from people in poverty. While trying to avoid their participation becoming a 'box-ticking exercise', we did not necessarily translate their participation as their direct involvement in every research step, but always tried to consider how to make choices that contributed to the research objectives. From a similar consideration, people in poverty were also sometimes involved differently than, for instance, practitioners. Such suggestions and choices, however, caused some vigorous debates during the research process on how these related to the partnership with people in poverty.

An example of a discussion between a practitioner and the researcher exemplifies this debate. In the second empirical study, the choice was made to conduct interviews based on the participatory observations. A differentiation was made in how to conduct these interviews. With practitioners, the choice was made to conduct one-on-one interviews as the interviews were directed at their concrete actions. With people in poverty (as well as with volunteers and policy makers), the choice was made to conduct group interviews since these could provide a more in-depth conversation about the meaning of the actions of practitioners. While this plan was being presented to a practitioner from a specific organisation – without going in-depth into the reasoning behind the choices – she objected, stating that “the researcher herself did not take the posed idea of parity of participation to heart, as people were not treated on a par in the manners of how to gain information”.

While through exchange, this discussion was clarified, it is exemplary of the moments of friction in the research about when, how and in what way to stimulate the participation of people in poverty in the research process. Here, such moments of friction and reflection appeared to relate to a conceptualisation of 'genuine participation' of people in poverty in the research process in which it was sometimes believed that people in poverty should be enabled to do the same things and should be involved in every research choice. Such pressure was certainly present with practitioners from the APRVs and the Network against Poverty as the search for real and genuine participation and inclusion of people

in poverty in the research was commonly raised by them. Simultaneously with this remark, the real participation of people in poverty was then often translated into the suggestion to conduct some sort of inquiry with a substantive group of people in poverty.

As such, the danger sometimes appeared to be in the risk of a participatory objective being translated into a 'box-ticking exercise' (Beresford, 2010) or a 'dogma' or 'tyranny of participation' (Cook & Kothari, 2001) in which reflection on the implications of the participatory objective for gaining a better understanding of the research questions disappeared.

The question about 'how' to involve people in poverty should not dominate the more ethical consideration of 'why' methodological choices are made. The involvement of marginalized voices within research projects was considered to be an important and complex, yet not a necessary condition for research. (Roose et al., 2016, p. 1029)

Nevertheless, this does not imply that the researchers were prophets on how to achieve the genuine participation of people in poverty and of all research subjects for that matter. For instance, while exchange of the knowledge of different stakeholders, thus also of people in poverty, was considered important in this particular research, debates, as exemplified above, might also point out the danger of *naivety* on the part of the research/researcher. By creating formal and informal participatory opportunities in which everyone could have their say about the research process if they wanted to, an idea sometimes existed that everyone would thus also do so, possibly blinding the research team to power-related issues in the research process. While reflecting on the research process afterwards, such a danger might be even more relevant, as debates on participating and influencing the research process were almost never started by people in poverty themselves, but rather by practitioners.

Deriving from such tensions, it is thus vital to reflect critically in research projects on what 'genuine' participation in that research involves. Conducting participatory research by bringing different stakeholders together in steering groups and creating openness to discussing the research from beginning to end should never be disconnected from reflection on power-related issues, in which the power of the researcher – and of practitioners and people in poverty – to influence and determine the process, discussion and outcomes of this exchange should not be underestimated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Franks, 2011; Mehta, 2008; Schiettecat et al., 2014; Schiettecat et al., 2017).

7.1.4 Stimulate debate on the problem of poverty

While research can easily take on a deconstructive stance in which practices are brought down due to their counterproductive effects, this research started from a profound respect for social work practices and more specifically for Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice in trying to engage in the fight against poverty. Rather than sharply criticising practice, a starting point in this research was that in this commitment, potential flaws are inevitable for and inherent in practice. Consequently, the analysis and interpretation of the research findings also started from the recognition of the (possibly flawed) attempts to engage in this complexity. As such, APRVs provided a critical case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) for reflecting on the complexity of shaping a pedagogy of combatting poverty through which further reflection could be stimulated on how social work practice could engage critically in the fight against poverty.

Research is thus an 'interpretative practice', in which meanings are derived from research findings and in turn translated into public issues, influencing the public debate about the issue at hand:

The meanings given to research insights inherently grow through the process of interaction between the researcher, the research subjects, and policy and practice. This relates to the possibilities of public and democratic debate with social actors in our societies in the creation of solidarity and social justice. (Roose et al., 2016, p. 10)

This implies firstly that the interaction between researcher and research subjects was an important way of creating new knowledge and meanings for research purposes, but also influenced practice itself. By asking critical questions about the meaning and implications of the work of APRVs, by providing opportunities for exchange and reflection on preliminary findings, by bringing in and discussing theoretical frameworks and perspectives, and by discussing the connection of such perspectives with the daily work of APRVs, this research is therefore not only a goal on its own, but also part of the ongoing process of giving meaning to and consequently shaping practice. While this is an 'undefined process' – as it is not (yet) clear what its influence will be on daily practice – and a 'never-ending process' which other circumstances will also influence, the research has, however, influenced the reflection of practitioners on their own work from a commitment to social justice and societal change, and as such has enabled them to reflect on, and reconsider, their strategies and engagement.

In the same vein, this research is one way of stimulating further dialogue and debate on the work of Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice and, more broadly, on the role of social work in the fight against poverty. In times of challenging socio-political and economic circumstances, research is not only part of these contexts, but can choose to affirm or to question contemporary problem definitions (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). A possible contribution of this research towards influencing the public debate is therefore the articulated connection it makes in connecting this role to the promotion of social justice, societal transformation and the participation of people in poverty, while also giving acknowledgement to the inherent complexity for social work practice to do so. In this regard, this dissertation should not be regarded as the concluding piece or final breach. From a commitment towards such values and goals, other strategies will be sought to stimulate reflection on how social work can relate to the fight against poverty. Here, creating opportunities to stimulate exchange on an academic level, but also exchange between participants, social work practitioners, social movements and policy makers will be pursued. As mentioned, a book will be written in collaboration with the Network against Poverty and the steering committee about the research, and findings will be presented to a broad group of social workers from different fields. As such, researchers can become “social activists” in attempting to “do something” (Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 292) and actively engage in the public debate on the problem of poverty from a commitment to the participation of people in poverty and social justice (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Krumer-Nevo, 2009; Roose *et al.*, 2015).

7.1.5 To choose or not to choose?

In the previous parts, the choices that were made in the research process were rendered transparent and explicit. However, in articulating and writing down how I - as a researcher on poverty and on a pedagogy of combatting poverty - made or suggested some choices concerning the problem statement, choice of theory and critical perspectives, participation of people in poverty and representation strategies, it might come across as if that this research was a well-thought out and rational enterprise from beginning to end. In an attempt to not only do justice to this particular research process, but possibly also contribute to the reflection on the complexity - and sometimes messiness - of critical and participatory research, it might be as important to conclude this section by articulating the ‘messiness’ or ‘ambiguity’ of the research process (Roose *et al.*, 2015; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2017), as well as the pitfalls and opportunities this might offer.

Not all research choices were planned or made in rational ways, though it were often sporadic choices while attempting to deal with the unexpectedness of the research. While being committed to get to know and dig into practice and the perspectives of different parties in the practice, as a researcher you have pre-thought ideas on how you should conduct your research, in what ways knowledge about specific subjects can be generated, and how you should position yourself in relation to the research subjects. However, this research often challenged my own conceptualisations as a researcher in numerous ways. For instance, often well-thought-out and collaboratively discussed research plans proved to be in tension with the practical reality in which they were conducted. An example of such tensions can be provided by a reflection on the focus groups that were conducted in the research. Although numerous topics were planned to be addressed and discussed in the planning of the structured focus groups with the steering committee, it appeared that in engaging in these conversations participants often wanted to dwell on one specific topic. For instance, while the preparation of the two concluding focus groups was the same, in one group practitioners seem especially interested in the idea of parity of people in poverty, while in the second group intense discussions were held about the meaning of participation in trying to effect societal change. Rather than sticking to our pre-structured research plan on such occasions and to the same time frame for every subject, recognition was given to the reality that these topics were important at that specific time for the participants.

As such, committing to participatory research might be about making choices in advance in collaboration with different stakeholders, but also about 'going with the flow of letting unexpected things happen', even if they interfere with the original plan. In the same vein, on numerous occasions, as a researcher, I was put on the spot by research subjects, for instance when asked about my personal life during semi-structured interviews, by being addressed as an adviser for practitioners or asked to take part in activities, or by being confronted with a group respondents from numerous backgrounds while the interview was to involve one practitioner. While such unexpected moments made me uncomfortable and in conflict with my starting idea of how to conduct good research, it became apparent during the research process that precisely such moments could also provide unexpected opportunities in the research. By providing information about my own life, but also addressing what sort of questions I did not feel comfortable in answering, by becoming angry and emotional when hearing people's life stories, by giving advice to participants during observations, by becoming an active participant on some occasions or by taking on a 'semi-structured interview' with eight respondents, sometimes a

reshaped relationship between researcher and research subjects and the organisations came to the surface. This relationship was based on authenticity, in which the researcher is not only committed to being and perceived as a critical investigator, but also aims to be and is perceived as a critical bystander in trying to address the problems people in poverty deal with and how social work practice can address the complexity of these problems. As a result of this authentic relationship, research subjects – practitioners, people in poverty and volunteers – showed trust in the researcher and showed a surprising openness about, for instance, their perspectives on the role of the practitioner or in their struggle and flawed attempts to engage in the fight against poverty.

The ‘uncertainty of a research process’ should therefore be embraced in which making committed choices in research should go hand in hand with an openness to re-evaluating those choices, choosing on the spot or just letting things happen. And while the outcome of such an exercise is uncertain and possibly flawed, it can reveal an authenticity on the part of the researcher towards the research topic and subjects which might offer opportunities for stronger relationships with thinking about and acting with practices, practitioners and people in poverty and provide more in-depth insights and reflections.

7.2 Towards a pedagogy of combatting poverty through our research

In the introduction chapter of this dissertation, our main problem statement was outlined: how can social practitioners act upon the inherent complexity of recognising the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to engage in the fight for social justice; or what we have also phrased as: how can a ‘pedagogy of combatting poverty’ be shaped while taking the participation of people in poverty to heart.

In the following chapters of this dissertation, different interconnected and evolving layers of reflection on how to shape such a pedagogy of combatting poverty can be discovered:

In chapter 2, the question is tackled on a conceptual level by drawing on the social justice theory of Nancy Fraser. Here, it is argued that social work practices should embrace the inherent tensions and ambiguities in which they are caught when dealing with the problem of poverty, rather than try to find ways to escape from them. From such a stance, a role for social work might be the creation of

cultural forums in which a range of concerns, perspectives and claims of injustice of people in poverty can be discovered and discussed on a footing of parity, and can be projected and represented in society so that their perspectives on issues of poverty are brought into the debate. This chapter constitutes the conceptual framework of this dissertation and can be seen as its 'backbone'.

In chapter 3, the main complexities of the 'how', the 'who' and the 'what' of social justice (Fraser, 2005) that arise in creating cultural forums centred on participatory principles and practice were discussed. By drawing on the first study, in which we conducted interviews with practitioners from 36 Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice, it was revealed that while APRVs fully commit to the ideal of parity of participation, power asymmetries and social inequalities nevertheless come to the surface and the ambiguity of empowering people while also trying to stimulate structural change leads to tensions between affirmative and transformative strategies in the fight against poverty.

Starting from our conceptual idea of cultural forums, a follow-up in-depth study was conducted in five APRVs in order to gain a deeper understanding of the pedagogical strategies of practitioners for dealing with the complexities of shaping such a pedagogical project. Here, three vital components relating to the importance of practitioners were distinguished:

- Linking strength-based and empowering environments to structural and transformative objectives;
- Stimulating the development of critical consciousness among people in poverty about the collective and unjust nature of poverty;
- Dealing with the complexities of the direct participation of people in poverty in public debate.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, these components are analysed and discussed in all their complexity.

In chapter 4, the vital importance of practitioners in shaping environments that enable the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty while linking such practices to the broader socio-political context was addressed. It was revealed that the recognition and empowerment of people in poverty is enabled not only through niches in which participants are addressed on their strengths in daily practice, but also through the conception of the transformative potential of such

niches, in which people in poverty are positioned as indispensable active partners in the fight against injustice. Nevertheless, also revealed was the complexity of denouncing the socio-economic and political subordination of people in poverty without defining people in poverty by their status.

Chapter 5 dealt more concretely with the complexity of how practitioners can actively engage people in poverty in the struggle for societal change, more specifically with the topic of how practitioners can engage with the processes of alienation and internalisation to which people in poverty have been subjected to. By connecting our empirical study to the work of Paulo Freire, it was revealed that practitioners have a vital role in 'reframing poverty as a collective concern' and in 'connecting people's experiences to a structural analysis'. While practitioners use power in intentional ways, they also often mask their own power. It is therefore argued that they should acknowledge and openly discuss the power asymmetry in their practices in ways that enable a critical consciousness to flourish, with people in poverty as well as with practitioners and the wider society.

Chapter 6 discussed how the complexities and tensions arising from the participation of people in poverty in representation processes relates to the role of social practitioners from those organisations in trying to bring about societal change. Here, a dual role for APRV practitioners was proposed: a 'guardian of collective and transformative elements'; and a 'strategic chess player'. The chapter concludes that there is a need for practitioners who are able to reflect critically on participatory premises in processes of representation, but that such strategic considerations should always be collaboratively discussed with people in poverty.

7.3 Building blocks for a pedagogy of combatting poverty in social work

In this dissertation, we have thus conceptualised a pedagogy of combatting poverty for social work as the creation of 'cultural forums' and consequently engaged in a critical exploration of how social practitioners can be, and remain, committed to such a pedagogy and to the complexities that emerge, while drawing on empirical research in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice. While not pretending that this doctoral research project constitutes 'the' pedagogy and reveals 'the' strategies for social work practitioners to build it and deal with all its complexities, we want to offer some main building blocks and

reflection themes that derive from this research. In that sense, we hope to stimulate further reflection on how social work practices and practitioners can critically engage in the fight against poverty while embracing the principle of participation.

7.3.1 Taking a social justice perspective to heart in social work

In Belgium, as well as in many other countries, shifts in the welfare state, combined with the influence of neo-liberal ideas, have impacted on the way social care is conceived in contemporary welfare states in which the development of the self and individual responsibility have increasingly come to the fore (Cantillon, 2011; Clarke, 2005; Dean, 2007; Ferguson, 2008; Handler, 2003; Lorenz, 2014, 2016, 2017).

Such changes on the political and policy levels have also influenced the commitment of social work to the fight against poverty (Craig, 2002; Garrett, 2010; Gupta, 2017; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Lorenz, 2016, 2017; Webb, 2010, 2014). For instance, this dissertation has addressed the fact that 'identity politics' has become high on the political agenda, which has given rise to practices in which personal identities are celebrated and an optimal self-realisation is stressed (Fraser, 2000; Garrett, 2010; Webb, 2010, 2014). This creates the danger that social work's engagement in anti-poverty strategies is reduced to a sort of psychological or therapeutic profession to help the person develop individual aspirations and move towards integration into society, while cutting loose the structural conditions and power structures within society (Baistow, 2000; Lister, 2002; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Sayer, 2005; Stepney, 2006; Webb, 2010):

Whilst these ideas [referring to the influence of psychoanalytic thinking in connection with relationship-based practice] have been a useful challenge to increasingly bureaucratic and procedurally driven social work practice, the focus on an individual's functioning without drawing upon ideas from sociology and theories of social justice can serve to compound the individualizing of blame when working with families living in poverty. (Gupta, 2017, p. 456)

Additionally, the danger of 'blaming the poor' lurks ever larger around the corner through the current implementation of social rights in social interactions and practices within the welfare state. Increasingly, social rights can only be

effectuated if people also take on pre-determined obligations (Handler, 2003; Maesele, 2012). When able to fulfil these obligations as well as comply with such mechanisms, people are situated on the deserving end of the social support system since they are seen as having had bad luck and misfortune. However, when failing and/or refusing to do so, people are conceived as disobedient, hopeless, lazy and profiteers.

Consequently, the re-emerging division between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' people and the inherent mistrust in people on which this division is based open up a whole range of 'neo-philanthropic' and preventive measures to ensure that these expectations and obligations are met while negative consequences and sanctions ensue if people do not follow 'the enlightened path' (Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Villadsen, 2007). To demonstrate with a concrete example, a current news item on the evening news is that in one of the largest cities in the country, the dominant party is weighing up the possibility of taking up a point in their programme to sanction people (hence people who speak a different language) who do not send their children to pre-school institutions by cutting their allowances. This example reveals the growing and already real danger that social work practice will make care and service provision conditional for individuals, while ignoring the complexity of poverty and the complex interplay of economic, political and cultural factors that impede the opportunities and abilities of individuals and groups to connect with society and fulfil such expectations (Garrett, 2010; Gupta, 2017; Gupta *et al.*, 2017; Lorenz, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Roose *et al.*, 2012; Stepney, 2006; Webb, 2010 & 2014).

As such, the sketched evolutions necessitate reflection on how social work practice can engage with the question of how to connect the growing demand for individual responsibility with a perspective that takes into account the societal responsibility of dealing with social problems (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014). This dissertation has emphasised that social work committed to a pedagogy of combatting poverty should take the principle of social justice to the core of their profession, since

(...) the disappearance of a social work profession rooted in social justice would be a defeat for those committed to challenging oppression and inequality. Conversely, it would be an encouragement to those in positions of power who seek to blame the poor and oppressed for their own poverty and for the problems they experience. (Ferguson, 2008, p.15)

Taking into account not only the methodical commitment of ‘doing things right’, but also a commitment to ‘doing right things’ (Biesta, 2014; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010), social workers thus need to consider what social justice might mean and “apply the principles of social justice to their own organisations” (Craig, 2002, p. 679). In our dissertation, inspiration was found in the framework of affirmative-transformative strategies to engage in such reflection.

7.3.2 From the individual-structural towards the affirmative-transformative

The following paragraph is the beginning of an article by Driessens and Geldof with the title ‘Individual and/or structure? Or what does social work want to take on?’. This is highlighted because it captures an intense historical and ongoing discussion in social work about where the focus of change is to be put when addressing social problems such as poverty (De Corte & Roose, 2018):

Social work wants to change, wants to work towards a world with more justice and people who are more strong and free. But how does social work want to do that? Who or what does it need to change then: the individual or family that appeals to social work, or the society in which they are located, the societal structures, society? Does it have any meaning to change individuals and their living conditions if society keeps on excluding and marginalizing them? Or opposite: does a just society make social work redundant, or will there always keep on being – also in the just society about which we dream – individual questions? (Driessens & Geldof, 2003, p.1, Own translation)

While touching on this topic, this discussion is often in some shape or form connected with exploring and explaining the diversity of social work approaches, methods and paradigms (see, for instance, Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Ferguson, 2008; Mullaly, 2007; Payne, 2005). For instance, Payne refers to a distinction between three views of social work objectives – ‘problem-solving’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘social change’ – which translate into a political position on where the objective of social work practice should lie (2005, p. 21). Mullaly (2007, p. 48), in turn, distinguishes ‘conventional’ and ‘progressive perspectives’ within social work while linking them to different theories and approaches in social work. An often used categorisation of social work practices also starts by reflecting on method(ology), in which social work can be divided into ‘social case work’, ‘social group work’ and ‘community work’ (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). While reflecting on the different theoretical inspiration, perspectives, chosen methods and

approaches, recognition is given to the varied, widespread identity and mixed practices of social work.

Nevertheless – and while often not the intent of authors that commit to such divisions – it appears as if this might involve some danger for social work practice itself when reflecting on individual-structural goals. Mullaly (2007), for instance, points out that while “the conventional approaches have historically reinforced the status quo, they can be used in progressive ways [as] widespread agreement exists that social work has responsibility for both individual and structural interventions” (pp. 47-48). In practice, however, a commonly heard interpretation of such divisions is that there are approaches or paradigms in social work which are not or less suited to addressing structural change. This is, for instance, apparent when social work practitioners say that they “work directly with people so addressing change is something that practitioners in a higher rank should do” or that aiming for structural change is not part of their task since “other, better suited organisations will do this”. Other practices or practitioners in their turn see it “as their responsibility not to let go of everything they see and hear in their individual caring or service practices”, though then translate structural change as a rather methodical enterprise by, for instance, by annually shaping a folder for government with all the collected signals. And a more profound engagement for dealing with the individual-structural question occurs when social work practices state that in practice it should be about the both at the same time, an “and/and story”. My own professional experience in a community development practice exemplifies this connection of division in reflecting on the ambitions of the work by dividing them into (ped-)agogic goals and political goals. While trying to fit the actions of community builders into one of those two boxes in communicating with the government, this always resulted in interesting debates as practitioners argued that an activity was pedagogical as well as political, or that in trying to achieve the political goal, it was inherently pedagogical.

These examples are addressed since they reveal that reflecting on the question whether the focus of change in social work should be on individual or structural or individual and structural does not necessarily engage with the topic of ‘what sort of change should be aimed for’ when trying to engage in the fight against poverty. Should individuals and families be strengthened and empowered to integrate into society? Or be empowered to reflect critically on the injustices in their situation and become part of the fight for better living conditions for individuals as well as for groups of marginalised people? And what change is aimed for in society when structural change is discussed? Is it about creating structural facilities, services and organisations that provide aid and support for

people in poverty? Or is structural change about effectuating change in society that contributes to providing a life of human dignity for everyone and to the eradication of poverty? Getting clarity on this issue is vital, since, for instance, the recent government measure to try to provide a 1-euro meal to families in poverty is stated by the minister to be a real and effective structural measure, although it actually does not engage in a critical reflection on how poverty can be eradicated through societal change.

From a commitment to social justice and since social workers should be ‘agents of social change’ (Craig, 2002), it might therefore be much more relevant to stress the importance of reflecting more strongly on the objectives and consequences of the actions of social work while committing to a pedagogy of combatting poverty. Since social work has an important task in transforming private problems into public issues, it is argued that it is precisely in this transformation that a key question arises: “Is it the ambition of social work to integrate people in a particular order, or is it (also) the ambition to make political subjectivity possible?” (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014, p. 47).

To embrace such reflection, an alternative framework was therefore introduced in the second chapter of this dissertation that might be of greater relevance when connecting to the social justice aspirations of social work; namely reflecting on ‘affirmative’ and ‘transformative strategies’ to engage in this fight. This was inspired by the work of Nancy Fraser (1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008), who puts forward the ideal of a society in which everyone can participate on a par as the reflection of what social justice is and argues that the obstacles that impede this parity of participation should be addressed. Here, affirmative strategies are “aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). This implies that the consequences of injustices might be compensated for, but their structural causes remain untouched (Holemans, 2014). By contrast, transformative strategies are about changing the way society is organised and aim precisely at restructuring the underlying framework (Fraser, 2005). As such, they set out a clear societal project and political ambition from the get-go, providing another layer to reflecting on the ambitions of social work to bring about individual and/or structural change.

However, where Fraser has argued for transformative approaches in the fight for social justice, it was argued in chapter 2 that such a stance does not do justice to the complexity and urgency of fighting complex problems such as poverty in social work. Supported by empirical evidence, it was revealed in this dissertation

that affirmative strategies sometimes proved to be defensible for relieving the direct needs of people in poverty, to be of direct assistance to people, and to help them in their desire to find a place in society. For instance, there might be great value in social work practices that engage in providing low-cost meals or free food to people in poverty or in advocating the existence of such practices. However, recognizing the necessity for social work to engage in such strategies does not imply that a pedagogy of combatting poverty should shift from a conceptualisation of working towards both individual change 'and' structural change, to a framework of combining affirmative 'and' transformative strategies. Rather, social work practices involved in a pedagogy of combatting poverty should engage in the stimulation of societal change in such a way that the perspectives of unheard and marginalised groups in society are brought into public debate (Dean, 2013), so as to make possible its transformation towards a more just and participatory society. Nevertheless, while committing to this transformation, this also implies that social work practices are often in a position that affirmative strategies are necessary for finding an answer to fulfilling direct or individual needs, concerns and claims. We have therefore argued that social work should embrace the complexities in which it functions (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Lorenz, 2007; Roose *et al.*, 2012), being aware that it will sometimes need to invest in affirmative strategies in the fight against poverty but also – from its social justice commitments – that it should bring the need to do so and the possible counterproductive effect of doing so into public debate (Boone *et al.*, 2018a).

While committing to the transformation of society, this in no shape or form implies that individual change and development is not stimulated in such practices. On the contrary, it is in the core of such a pedagogy, since people are put forward as indispensable partners in transformative practice. As Biesta (2014) would state: "The engagement with the democratic experiment also transforms people, most importantly in that it has the potential to engender democratic subjectivity and political agency" (p. 7). However, and made clear, for instance, in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, in opposition to seeing individual change as a goal separate from the structural ambitions of social work, it is considered an inherent part of the participatory and collaborative exercise in trying to create cultural forums in which public debate on the problem of poverty is stimulated.

Nevertheless, as our findings have revealed, such participatory exercises are permeated by paradoxes, complexities and difficulties.

7.3.3 Imparity of participation as a way forward

Throughout this entire doctoral research project, the complexities of shaping participatory practices that aim for societal change came to the surface. In what follows, we will first briefly address them and then reflect on two potential roles of practitioners in dealing with the imparity of participation of people in poverty: the 'heroic agent' and the 'reflexive chess player in the 'art of the impossible'.

7.3.3.1 The complexities of working towards transformation

From a commitment to social justice and the conceptualisation of poverty as in its essence a structural participation problem (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Doom, 2003; Lister, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012), the notion of 'parity of participation' in the creation of a pedagogy of combatting poverty is highlighted throughout this dissertation. Essentially this implies that social justice is achieved when, and only when, all people are able to participate on a par in social life (Fraser, 2005). Important in this notion is that parity of participation is not just a question of how to take part on the political decision-making level, but is also influenced by issues of lack of sufficient resources, misrecognition and representational issues concerning status (Boone *et al.*, 2018a; Davies, Gray & Webb, 2014; Fraser, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008; Garrett, 2010; Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Webb, 2010, 2014). From such a broad and political conception of poverty, the pedagogic role of social workers in the fight against poverty was conceived as the creation of 'cultural forums' in which parity of participation is a basic premise in practice – implying that practitioners should try to create practices in which dialogue on their experiences of injustice can take place on a par – and a goal in society – implying that through such forums attempts are made to overcome the obstacles that impede parity of participation. To contribute to this transformation of society, social work can and should attempt to influence public debate by representing the perspectives, stories, concerns and ideas of people in poverty in the public sphere together with people in poverty. As such, in the conceptualisation of a pedagogy of combatting poverty, parity of participation is a starting point, a basic premise in shaping daily practice and a goal in society (Boone *et al.*, 2018a).

Nevertheless, it became very apparent that creating cultural forums built on such a belief and ideal is a challenging enterprise, in which complexities concerning the 'how', the 'who', and the 'what' of social justice became apparent through our research (Boone *et al.*, 2018b; Fraser, 2005; Marston & McDonald, 2012). Here, Davies *et al.* (2014) make an interesting point with regard to the idea of participation in participatory social work practices that aim to contribute to societal change:

In measuring the effectiveness of participation, the key question is not whether service users were given the opportunity to participate, but whether there were positive effects on economic, identity/cultural and political opportunities for service users as a result of the policy or intervention. (p.126)

As such, the participation of people in poverty cannot become a 'dogma' in such a pedagogy, with practitioners considering their practice successful if people in poverty are enabled to participate in daily practice as well as when stepping into the public debate. Rather, a participatory commitment should always go hand in hand with a commitment towards a reflection on what kinds of strategy tackle the cultural, economic and political obstacles that impede the ability of people in poverty to participate fully. In this regard, Lister (2002) concludes in an article focused on the process of anti-poverty strategies:

The substance and outcomes of anti-poverty action (...) must not be forgotten. Ultimately at issue, (...) are not just the promotion of genuine participation, but also the eradication of poverty and the redistribution of power. (p. 45)

While our research did not involve a study of the effects of the actions of APRVs, numerous activities in which attempts were made to influence policy, public debate and social services were observed, and during the interviews and focus groups, the topic of societal change was often addressed. As such, glimpses of the complexity of effectuating transformative goals while creating such cultural forums were revealed in this dissertation. In chapter four, for instance, it emerged that practitioners showed a lot of uncertainty about the societal effects of their actions, being far more secure in articulating what effects their work had on the individual than on how their actions had contributed to societal change. In chapter six, the direct participation of people in poverty appeared sometimes to have had counterproductive effects on the goal of societal change, revealing the inequalities of people in poverty in society rather than achieving power changes. And in our first study, practitioners repeatedly expressed their frustration that they were not able to change something or that they had to invest in affirmative measures that enabled individuals to move forward, since they felt they did not really have the power to change something at the political level or since people in poverty were in direct need of relief of their problems or concerns. So, while practitioners actively engaged in trying to overcome such obstacles, it did become apparent throughout the chapters that the premise of working on a par

with people in poverty in order to contribute to transforming society, often stand in direct and complex tension with one another.

Although APRVs are inspirational in showing how to shape participatory practices with transformative goals, a key conclusion of this dissertation is therefore that even in social work practices that are fully dedicated to the principle of participation while engaging in the fight against poverty, power asymmetries and social inequalities nevertheless come to the surface (Boone *et al.*, 2018b). Consequently, the need to reflect critically and re-evaluate the (non-)sense of making parity of participation the core of a pedagogy of combatting poverty may be vital.

In this reflection, an important topic was raised by Thompson (2009), which was briefly touched upon in the concluding reflections of the fifth chapter. While agreeing with Fraser's idea on participatory parity, that in its essence "it is for the citizens in a democracy to decide which claims for recognition, redistribution and representation are just", he states that "this is possible only if inclusive deliberation is underpinned by just recognition, redistribution and representation" (p. 1080). As such, while committing to participatory principles and practices, vicious circles might be created as "it is not always the case that more democracy leads to more justice, until democratic justice is fully achieved" (Thompson, 2009, p. 1080). This analysis prompts questions such as: can a more just society (thus a society in which everyone can participate on a par by eradicating the inequalities concerning misrepresentation, misrecognition and maldistribution) be achieved through social work practices in which opportunities are created for the voiceless or societally excluded to participate on a par? Or should a transformed and socially just society – thus in which obstacles concerning participatory parity can disappear – be achieved before everyone can participate on a par in (re-)building it and with participatory practices for that matter?

While these issues and questions have no easy or straightforward answers, they do point out that people in poverty¹⁷ are in a fundamental 'reality of imparity of participation', since they are excluded on the economic, cultural and political levels, which impedes their full participation in society, societal institutions and thus also social work practice. As such, and being committed to fight such

¹⁷ People in poverty are not the only ones in a state of imparity of participation, as there are a lot of individuals in such a state, though the situation of being in poverty logically implies that they are in that state since they are excluded on the economic, political and cultural level.

injustices, this requires that social work practice and practitioners engage with this imparity of participation in one way or another.

7.3.3.2 The danger of trying to become a heroic agent

A first possible stance towards the imparity of participation of people in poverty is that of 'heroic agent' (Marston & McDonald, 2012). This implies that an idea is planted about practitioners who have some kind of superpower through which they can overcome the inherent complexities that derive from the imparity of participation of people in poverty. We could say, firstly, that this idea of heroic agency is to some extent projected by government and policy makers onto APRV-practitioners, since APRVs are required to fulfil six criteria relating to a broad spectrum of individual as well as societal goals, yet get only a very low fixed subsidy to do so (insufficient to cover one full-time practitioner). Secondly, as we have hinted already throughout this dissertation, APRVs and their practitioners (and participants) themselves, whether intentionally or unintentionally, often relate to this idea of the social worker as a heroic agent.

For instance, our evidence reveals that APRVs and their practitioners do indeed engage in shaping practices committed to taking the perspectives of people in poverty as a starting point of practice and to providing intensive opportunities for dialogue and participation. As exemplified in the fourth chapter, they create contexts in which the socio-economic and political status of people is believed or stated not to affect their position in the organisation. As such, it becomes apparent that practitioners actively engage in an attempt to create 'miniature societies' in which imparity of participation is thought to have no influence on practice itself and through which society can be influenced and transformed towards greater justice and participatory parity. In creating such miniature societies, we have already argued that the work of APRVs stands in close relation to the pedagogical ideas offered by Paulo Freire. Through his ideas, a belief is projected that the actual worldviews and lifeworlds of people in poverty will come to the surface through 'authentic dialogue' between the social worker and the participants, making possible dialogue and reflection about injustice that might consequently lead to action in and transformation of the world. Undoubtedly, his ideas are still of tremendous value for contemporary social work, as they grasp convincingly how – through a dialogical process of questioning society with and through the people who were conceived as not being full members of it – society loses its validity as having no alternative. Therefore, and while drawing on the work of APRVs, we re-emphasise in this conclusion that creating such participatory contexts and commitment of

practitioners to these dialogical strategies is a vital necessity, even more so in light of the sketched neo-liberal evolutions. By engaging in participatory processes that give the voices of the powerless a place in practice and by representing the perspectives of 'the voiceless' in society, it provides inspiration for reflecting on how to conceive counterforces against contemporary societal developments, as well as in social work, towards conditionality and personal responsibility.

Nevertheless, our evidence has also revealed that such a Freirean commitment creates all kinds of complexities when practitioners of such dialogical miniature societies are confronted with the actual imparities of people. For instance, by planting the idea that social workers are 'heroic agents' – or what Freire (1970) would call 'revolutionary leaders' – who with their unique superpowers are able to engage in dialogical methods and pedagogical strategies that overcome the power imbalances and differences in the subordinated socio-political and economic positioning of people in poverty, it creates a potential *blindness* to see that the premise of parity of participation is not, nor will it become, a reality in social work practice as long as parity of participation is not achieved in society (chapter 4). Additionally, our findings have hinted that trying but failing to achieve the ideal of being such a heroic agent or revolutionary leader might create a 'masking social worker' (chapter 5) who conveys the idea that people have the power of decision and as such become part of the oppressive relations they want to challenge. In the same vein, the transformative potential of participatory social work practices is not straightforward, directly tangible or easily visible and it is "inherently difficult to determine the decisive factors that lead to policy change" (Marston & McDonald, 2012, p. 1036). As such, the gap between the hope for transformation through the creation of participatory opportunities for people in poverty in public debate and the reality of what it actually leads to might leave social workers disappointed or an illusion lighter. Here, a real danger for social work practitioners is to become paralysed, petrified or frustrated in trying to achieve transformation. Consequently, this can lead to an instrumentalisation of participation or policy work (for instance, by emphasising the number of policy meetings they had, translating societal change into the annual shaping of a folder for government with all the collected signals, by being pleased when people in poverty can sit around the table in local policy-meetings) or to the danger of holding back on working towards the acceptance and integration of individuals into society, since the desired change is believed to be hopeless. In other words, not being able to see, grasp and point out what is changed through participatory social work actions might create the danger of practitioners to one-sidedly fold back on what they can experience, articulate, give practical effect to and prove.

Deriving from all this complexity, a critical consideration made by Marston and McDonald (2012) warns of the danger that practitioners need to “eschew monomodal self-conceptualisations that position the professional self as a ‘heroic agent’ capable of single-handedly effecting individual and social change on a large scale” (p. 1036). Concluding, we therefore suggest an alternative stance towards participatory principles and transformative ideals for social work practice and social workers committed to the fight for social justice. In this alternative vision, the attempt is not made to heroically eradicate the imparity of people in poverty by conveying the idea that parity of participation can ever be fully achieved in practice and society, since this leads to despair and frustration. Rather, we suggest a stance in which the imparity of people in poverty is embraced in practice as a way to confront society continuously with the unjust nature of poverty. We will discuss this idea more fully below.

7.3.3.3 Becoming reflexive chess players: being involved in the art of the impossible

Arguing for embracing the imparity of people in poverty as an inherent part of social work implies, firstly, that social workers should be or become ‘reflexive practitioners’, committed to ‘doing right things’ as discussed above. Such reflexivity inherently entails the awareness “that social pedagogues (social workers) in practice always work in contexts of complexity and uncertainty” (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010, p. 149). As such, reflexivity is about

engaging with the debate surrounding the meaning of social work and its flaws, while taking responsibility for these flaws and simultaneously searching for new, undoubtedly flawed, answers. (Roose et al., 2012, p. 13)

Rather than seeing their job as taking the necessary steps towards a predetermined just society, social workers should thus embrace the complexity, uncertainty and incompleteness of their work, and learn to acknowledge, embrace and discuss this. Taking on such a stance or perspective is not easy as it means letting go of the idea that the practitioner should be or can become the ‘knower’, ‘expert’ or ‘ultimate strategist’ in effecting predetermined individual and societal change ambitions. While stepping away from the conceptualisation of social workers as liberated and revolutionary heroic agents who can overcome all complexities (Marston & McDonald, 2012), we concluded in chapter six that social workers might conceive their own pedagogical role as ‘learning to become chess players’ in the complex field of recognising the needs and concerns of

people in poverty while aiming for societal transformation. In a one-dimensional reading, the plea for practitioners to learn to become chess players can be conceived as practitioners who are in control of all that happens in practice, and who use people in poverty as pawns in their game to achieve predetermined goals (Roets *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, a different and multi-layered image of 'learning to become a chess player' is evoked throughout this dissertation. Committing to a pedagogy of combatting poverty implies that, rather than being the expert and ultimate strategist, the social worker should be an enabler of a collective, participatory and collaborative exercise in learning to play chess, in which the role of social workers first and foremost lies in enabling joint reflection and dialogue about the injustices that people in poverty have to endure and about the necessity but inherent complexity of engaging in the public debate surrounding the fight against poverty without knowing what the outcome will be of the actions and strategies that are taken on.

To start off with, such a stance implies that practitioners should learn to see, accept and acknowledge that power imbalances and the impurity of people in poverty are not only a societal issue, but also an inherent part of their own participatory practices that aim to transform society. Rather than trying to resolve this in straightforward manners, it implies that social workers actively engage in constant reflection about what participation at a certain time, for certain individuals in the light of a certain goal might imply:

[F]rom a democratic perspective, social work starts from awareness of the diversity of meanings of the same situation, and from the responsibility to understand these meanings through interaction and communication with the people involved. (Bouverne-De Bie et al., 2014, p. 52)

In this dissertation, the complexity of trying to take such a stance to heart was touched upon frequently. For instance, we have given examples of moments of contestation between practitioners and participants when they did not see eye to eye about what action should be undertaken. Here, our observations revealed that the practitioner sometimes intentionally used his/her power to protect a large group of vulnerable people or to help promote change (Tew, 2006). We learn from this that it is not the creation of a power- or dissension-free social work practice in which the ideas of people in poverty guide practice that is at stake, but the involvement of practitioners in making continuous efforts to engage in dialogical and reflexive exercises together with people in poverty. Practitioners should foster deliberation about the constant renegotiation of what the

participatory practices and power of practitioners, people in poverty and others might mean for all those involved, as well as how a participatory idea connects to the fight against poverty.

While there is danger that people in poverty might feel defined by their differences in addressing issues of parity, power and subordination (see, for instance, chapter 4), our research also reveals the value of social work practices that start from a genuine attempt to recognise people in poverty as being intrinsically – though not actually - on a par and as indispensable partners in the fight against poverty. Such practices create openness to having in-depth discussions about the collective and public nature of injustices faced by people in poverty through an authentic – although flawed – dialogue. Or in other words, by committing to the creation of forums that provide the space to reflect collaboratively on experiences and issues of injustice in the political, economic and cultural domains (Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b; Fraser, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008), dialoguing about difference, power and subordination together with people in poverty is enabled. This opens up opportunities to re-evaluate the meaning of the power of practitioners and of participatory enterprises in practice itself. Additionally this also opens up opportunities to create solidarity and indignation about the unjust nature of the daily struggles people in poverty have to endure with social workers, volunteers and other bystanders.

Consequently, embracing the parity of participation of people in poverty might in its turn have important transformative potential. Here, we have already argued that aiming for the transformation of society towards parity of participation is a tremendously difficult and at times impossible ambition. However, people in poverty, social workers and social work practice should never be satisfied with ‘the art of the possible’,¹⁸ which implies that strategies are undertaken that merely compensate for the injustices that people in poverty endure and thus consequently affirm the existing society. As argued, social work is about so much more than the technical question of how to do things right. Starting from the commitment of social work to the principle of social justice and to ‘doing right things’, the denouncing of the intrinsically unjust nature of poverty and the life conditions of people in poverty should always be central in their work in the hope of contributing to a more just society.

¹⁸ Refers to the phrase ‘politics is the art of the possible’, which is associated with the pragmatism of Realpolitik. It conceptualizes politics as a rather technical matter of what can be done within the existing boundaries (cf. doing thing right).

However – and stepping away somewhat from a Freirean commitment – this does not imply that there is a clear societal end project possible in which authentic dialogue and parity of participation can be fully realised in society, since “every answer to social problems remains incomplete in any case because it is, in a sense, just an answer that opens up new possibilities, questions and limitations” (Roose *et al.*, 2012, p. 9). Rather than framing its own actions in the light of such an unflawed end goal, social work practice committed to the fight against poverty can and should therefore be committed to ‘the art of the impossible’,¹⁹ in which “the very parameters of what is considered ‘possible’ in the existing constellation” (Zizek, 2000, p. 199) are changed. Here, Biesta²⁰ (2014) makes a striking remark which connects with this art of the impossible:

Both the flock and the one standing out are part of an existing social order, albeit that they are differently positioned within it. Democracy rather occurs at the moment when one of the sheep turns its head and makes a claim for a way of acting and being that cannot be conceived within the existing order and in that way, therefore, does not yet exist as a possible identity within this order. (Biesta, 2014, pp. 4-5)

For social work practices, such a commitment to the art of the impossible consequently implies making continuous attempts to disrupt “the symbolic contours of the world as it is” (De Bruyne & Van Bouchaute, 2014, p. 22, own translation) without knowing what change will be effectuated and what world will be the result of such disruption. Such attempts should not remain value-free but should start from a commitment to social justice and strategies conducted ‘in the name of equality’ (Biesta, 2014; De Bruyne & Bouchaute, 2014; Debaene, 2018; Holemans, 2014), in which social work practice can be an essential player in enabling the voices of excluded and oppressed groups to be heard (Dean, 2013). Through the persistent effort to create forums in which the needs, concerns and claims of injustice of people in poverty are discussed, collectivised and translated into public issues, and by consequently representing the injustices which people in poverty have to endure in public debate, opportunities are shaped to confront society with the distance between their ‘claim for parity of participation’ and ‘the reality of the imparity of people in poverty’ in the economic, political and cultural domains (Boone *et al.*, 2018a).

¹⁹ This concept opposes a pragmatic view of politics or ‘post-politics’ in which the old ideology divide is abandoned for a view that all what works is good. This concept is used in for instance the work of Vaclav Havel, Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Zizek.

²⁰ Building on the work of Jacques Rancière.

A former employee of the Network against Poverty summarised such an art of the impossible beautifully while explaining to us what he did during a sensitising game concerning poverty. To exemplify the powerlessness of people in poverty, the initiators of the game divided participants into two roles, 'policy makers' and 'people in poverty', and gave them respectively two or one dice. While it was within the logic of the game to stop when policy makers threw 7 or more, the practitioner explained that he threw his one dice simply to show that he was still there, and argued that it was not because he did not have good odds to beat the other player, he would simply give up and go away.

We can learn from such an example that a good player²¹ – or a committed social worker in the fight against poverty for that matter – might not be the one who keeps on rolling the dice until he gets the combination or result he was wanting since this implies that he/she “makes use of causality and probability to produce a combination that he sees as desirable” (Deleuze, 1983, pp. 26-27). As we have already argued, the confrontation between the belief in reaching a predetermined end goal and the flawed attempts to attain it might only leave the social worker frustrated or disappointed. Therefore, not rolling the dice, as well as keeping on rolling the dice while not acknowledging the actual situation that arises out of an undesired number of dice eyes, might be problematic. Rather, the committed social worker might be the one who actively embraces the uncertainty of how the dice might fall or the chess game evolve, as well as the one who takes on the result of every game – whether it is winning or losing in terms of the game-rules – as a chance to engage in collaborative learning opportunities together with people in poverty on what the game in itself and the result of the game has implied for people in poverty as well as for the debate on poverty.

Consequently, such metaphors about chess or rolling the dice symbolically capture our argument that keeping silent or operating within the existing rules of engagement from a realisation that the power to effectuate change is missing should always be traded in for introducing the perspectives and injustices of people in subordinated situations and for denouncing the imparity of people in poverty. Despite the given that this might not always directly change something, it might potentially *alter the discussion and discourse* in the long run (Marston & McDonald, 2012), through which a new societal project is created which in its turn might raise new opportunities and questions (Roose *et al.*, 2012). While

²¹ Deleuze (1985), referring to the work of Nietzsche, discusses the dice game, in which he makes a distinction between a bad player – who only rolls the dice from a belief in causality – and the good player – who finds meaning in every event of rolling the dice, despite the result. For more information: Deleuze, G. (1983). *Nietzsche and philosophy*. London: Continuum.

being aware that the power of people in poverty and of social work practice engaged with people in poverty might be limited, persistent and continuous attempts should thus be made to shape forums in which practitioners exchange and collaborate with people in poverty about their experiences of injustice in the cultural, political and economic domains (Fraser, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008), but also in which connections and bridges (sometimes setting these on fire again) with other citizens, policy makers and social workers should be made:

In the face of evidence of growing social inequality, social workers undoubtedly need individual hope to inspire collective action. What might seem to be unrealistic hope can begin in considering the possibility that tiny cracks might yet break open the dam and contingent openings are sites of unexpected force—for better or for worse. (Marston & McDonald, 2012, p. 1036)

By working with diverse coalitions and seeking allies to effect change, windows of opportunity can be created to project and represent the unjust nature of poverty and confront society with the actual imparity of people in poverty. As such, hopefully 'moments of disruption' will occur, leading to societal dialogue and reflection about how the reality of imparity can be altered towards a more participatory parity and social justice, while at the same time realising that all reformulated answers will in turn be flawed and need disruption.

7.4 Potential future endeavours

Let us end where we began: social work is not a neutral and independent enterprise, but relates directly with the prevailing social, economic and political welfare regimes and policies (Cantillon, 2011; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2015). On the one hand, this has led to worrisome developments in social work practice, for instance in complying with the conditionalisation of support or in shifting back to an identity politics aimed at integrating the willing poor into society (e.g. Garrett, 2010; Gupta, 2017; Handler, 2003; Webb, 2010, 2014). On the other hand, a hopeful sign is embedded in the emerging plea from much social work practice as well as social work scholars to question the retrenchment of the welfare state, to 'bark again', to link working with deprived individuals or groups with a socio-economic and political analysis and to recommit to the fight for social justice. The 'Poverty-Aware Social Work Paradigm' (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, 2017), for instance, clearly promotes a social justice agenda, while aiming to bring "poverty to the forefront of social work theory and practice" (Saar-Heiman

et al., 2017, p. 1055). By attempting to make social workers aware of the interplay between the lack of material, social and symbolic capital of people in poverty, the development of such frameworks offers opportunities to repoliticise the issue of poverty in daily social work practice as poverty is placed in the context of power relations in which social workers should stand by the resistance and fight of people in poverty. Critical initiatives, such as SWAN (Social Work Action Network), which for the last few years has had a Flemish section, also build on a social justice agenda, arguing for close relationships and solidarity with the situation of service users and making a plea for collective action and alternative forms of solidarity. And in May 2018, a hopeful sign became visible in Flanders when 1000 social workers and scholars (and a few hundred more on the waiting list) came together at a conference in Brussels in which they stood behind and discussed a 'strong social work' committed to human and social rights and social justice for all (Vandekinderen *et al.*, 2018). These are only a few examples of how social workers as well as social work academics are attempting in numerous ways to 'reclaim' social work on the ethical, relationship, social, and structural levels in a profound commitment to social justice (Ferguson, 2008). As such, this dissertation can also be considered a contribution to the discussion of how to reclaim social work.

The overall ambition of this dissertation was to broaden the theoretical and empirical knowledge of how social work and social practitioners can develop a pedagogy of combatting poverty, focused on dealing with the complex interplay of taking the direct concerns and aspirations of people in poverty into consideration while striving for societal change and social justice. In order to do so, it has engaged with some specific theoretical frameworks and perspectives, and has built upon the Flemish context and upon one specific case study, Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice, to stimulate discussion and reflection on the role of social work and practitioners in the fight against poverty. Consequently, in no shape or form does it present 'right solutions' in dealing with the inherent complexities of engaging in participatory practice that aims for societal change, nor has it definitively demarcated a pedagogy of combatting poverty. Rather it aims to be a modest though engaged contribution to a necessary ongoing discussion about how social work can establish integrated models or frameworks of social justice in the fight against poverty (Gupta, 2017).

This dissertation has, in our opinion, made a contribution in:

- Arguing for embracing the inherent complexity of committing to participatory principles when reflecting on a conceptual framework for social work and practitioners in the fight against poverty;
- Linking an integrated social justice framework with an in-depth and detailed empirical study which sheds light on the tremendous complexities of trying to engage in participatory practice while aiming for societal change;
- Carefully and with much detail unravelling the potential roles and pedagogical strategies of practitioners when engaging with all the complexities in such participatory practices.

The knowledge built up in this dissertation enables us to make some concluding suggestions for future potential endeavours in practice, policy and research.

While acknowledging the value of the work of Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice throughout this dissertation, they are also a relevant example of how “every answer to social problems remains incomplete in any case because it is, in a sense, just an answer that opens up new possibilities, questions and limitations” (Roose *et al.*, 2012, p. 9). We have therefore argued that it is vital for all social work practitioners to embrace the complexity, uncertainty and incompleteness of (the effectiveness of) their work, and that it is important to learn to acknowledge, embrace and discuss such complexity in practice. While this is not easy, it can strengthen practitioners, as it implies that they are aware that their work is limited but can at the same time stimulate the belief that by ‘keeping on rolling the dice’ while engaging in the uncertainty and actuality of every roll of the dice, they can also have significant meaning (Marston & McDonald, 2012; Roose *et al.*, 2012). By giving more explicit credit and acknowledgement to the ambiguous task of practitioners, this potentially can provide a realistic and engaged perspective to beginning social workers and an overall meaningful perspective to all practitioners who try to make sense of their work, and potentially avoid built-up frustration and dropping out. We believe therefore that there might be value in incorporating this perspective into the training programmes or activities of social work organisations (for instance, in the case of APRVs through the Network against Poverty) and further enabling it through interaction between social workers, since reflecting on such inherent complexities can serve as a reagent for practitioners to engage in reflection on ‘doing right things’ (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010, pp. 149-150) and contribute to:

the ongoing conversation about how the purpose and identity of social work can be clarified in the interests of providing a confident and socially engaged professional identity for beginning practitioners [as well as for all practitioners]. (Marston & McDonald, 2012, p. 1036)

In the same light, we argue that politicians and social policy makers should recognise this inherent complexity when acknowledging and subsidising social work practices and when engaging and collaborating with social workers. This is important because contemporary developments in social policy seem to push social workers further into practices of accountability based on criteria of effectiveness and success, in which practitioners should be able to show and prove what they have achieved in and through practice (Devlieghere, 2017). While it goes without saying that is important for social work practitioners to reflect on what they are doing and the request to reveal what practitioners do might help them in this reflection, this question or demand – even when asked out of a genuine commitment to address issues of poverty – often, however, leaves little room to bring in the importance but uncertain outcome of participatory processes for the individual as well as for societal change. Rather than conceiving the inherent complexities that arise from this engagement as containing intrinsic value to having an ongoing conversation about the problem of poverty and continuously reflecting on alternative strategies and pathways, this complexity is mostly considered as a problem that should be managed. And since participatory practices such as APRVs are often much more able to reveal their value for the growth of participants rather than for their contribution to structural change, it might lead to the danger that practices gradually are reduced to this component. An important lesson for social policy makers committed to the fight against poverty might also lie in the continuous acknowledgement that social workers and social work practices are not redundant players in the field of poverty, nor are they heroic agents able to overcome all this complexity. Rather they should conceive them as being necessary and critical players in the engagement of disrupting society in the hope, but also uncertainty, of bringing about societal change that has an impact on the concrete lives of people in poverty as well as on the eradication of poverty.

And with regard to future research projects committed to gaining insight into the role of social work in combatting poverty, it is important to see that engaging in a specific case study clearly implies that concrete findings and insights cannot be transferred straight forward or unambiguously to another context or case, but that this “does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 227).

By specifically conducting in-depth research into critical practices with regard to this research topic, a more profound and tangible understanding is produced of the inherent complexities of fully engaging with the principles of social justice, poverty and parity of participation in this commitment. Building up this knowledge and understanding is never an end point, but rather an opportunity to learn and stimulate further reflection on the issue of how to commit to the fight against poverty in the practices of APRVs as well as in broader social work practices. There might therefore be large potential in combining the knowledge derived from this case study with a variety of other critical case studies in different contexts, with reference to the geopolitical and policy context as well as in different areas of social work practice (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Also, despite or precisely because this research engaged in depth with the practices of APRVs, there might be some *additional research* areas ahead in those practices that could deepen the scientific knowledge already gathered and as such keep the debate about a pedagogy of combatting poverty to the forefront.

While we have addressed the issue of societal and policy change through the work of APRVs, longitudinal participatory research on their commitment to and struggles with processes of change might generate a deeper understanding of the complexity of this commitment. Here, we believe that a challenge for future research might lie in more clearly tracing, mapping and analysing the attempts of APRVs (and broader social work practices for that matter) to influence policy, services and society. As such, a deeper understanding can be built of whether these attempts contribute to the 'disruption' of society towards social justice by confronting it with the gap between the aim of parity of participation and the actual imparity of people or, rather, contribute intentionally or unintentionally to an affirmative way of dealing with the problem of poverty. While such analysis will not necessarily have a clear-cut answer, exposing and analysing these processes might give APRV-practitioners, participants and volunteers a greater sense of the potential value of their actions, which can be important to stimulating their commitment to the ongoing fight against poverty. Also, it might contribute to the reflection in practices on the inherent complexity of the fight against poverty and as such provide inspiration for alternative strategies of engaging in it, which on their turn enable new complexities and opportunities for reflection.

The commitment of APRVs starts from the collectivisation of the experiences, claims and concerns of people in poverty from the local environment. However, the Network against Poverty, as the umbrella organisation of all the Associations,

tries to bring all those 'local voices and knowledge' together in order to exert direct influence on Flemish and Belgian policy and on the political level. An additional value in understanding a pedagogy of combatting poverty might therefore be in studying how such collectivisation processes are undertaken and what their potential to alter policy and political discourses might be. Our research has also shed some light in that rather than conceiving local policy makers, service providers or other social work practices as being on the other side in the fight against poverty, they are often very committed to effectuating change but are torn between their ambition to be of significance for people in poverty and for the eradication of poverty, and the lack of tools and means to be so. As such, there might be considerable potential in committing to an in-depth analysis of how APRVs commit to engaging in diverse coalitions and working with allies to effect change, and how such processes can contribute to moments of 'disruption' of broader society.

7.5 References

- Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness. Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America'. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.
- Beresford, P. (2010). Public partnerships, governance and user involvement: A service user perspective. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34, 495–502.
- Biesta, G. (2014). Learning in public spaces: Civic learning for the twenty-first century. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie., & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 1–11). London: Springer.
- Biesta, G. (2018). *Tijd voor pedagogiek. Over de pedagogische paragraaf in onderwijs, opleiding en vorming*. Retrieved from <https://www.onderwijsraad.nl/upload/documents/tinymce/Tijd-voor-pedagogiek.pdf>
- Bogdan, C., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research in education. An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.

- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2003). Een rechtenkader als referentiekader. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock, & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 1–20). Ghent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek. Een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk*. Gent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Roose, R., Coussée, F., & Bradt, L. (2014). Learning democracy in social work. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 1–11). London: Springer.
- Cantillon, B. (2011). The paradox of the social investment state: Growth, employment and poverty in the Lisbon era. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 21(5), 432–449.
- Carey, M., & Foster, V. (2011). Introducing 'deviant' social work: Contextualising the limits of radical social work whilst understanding (fragmented) resistance within the social work labour process. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(3), 576–593.
- Clarke, J. (2005). New Labour's citizens: activated, empowered, responsabilized, abandoned. *Critical Social Policy*, 25(4), 447–463.
- Cook, B., & Kothari, U. (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* New York: Zed Books.
- Craig, G. (2002). Poverty, social work and social justice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 32(6), 669–682.
- Davies, K., Gray, M., & Webb, S. (2014). Putting the parity into service-user participation. An integrated model of social justice. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 119–127.

- Davis, A., & Wainwright, S. (2003). Combating poverty and social exclusion: Implications for social work education. *Social Work Education*, 24(3), 259–273.
- Dean, H. (2007). The ethics of welfare-to-work. *Policy and Politics*, 35(4), 573–590.
- Dean, H. (2013). The translation of needs into rights: Reconceptualising social citizenship as a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(S1), 32–49.
- Debaene, R. (2018). *Een democratie heeft nood aan sociaal werk. Vrijheid en gelijkheid staan centraal*. Retrieved from <https://sociaal.net/analyse-xl/een-democratie-heeft-nood-aan-sociaal-werk/>
- De Bruyne, P., & Van Bouchaute, B. (2014). De bestaande orde verstoren. Over de politieke opdracht van het middenveld. *Oikos*, 69(2), 19–31.
- De Corte, J., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work as a policy actor: Understanding social policy as an open-ended democratic practice. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance access online 20 April 2018. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1462768.
- Devlieghere, J. (2017). The logic of the database: In search of responsive social work (Doctoral Dissertation). Ghent: Ghent University.
- Doom, R. (2003). Armoede: Een essay van de open deur. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock, & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 245–272). Gent: Academia Press.
- Dowling, M. (1999). Social exclusion, inequality and social work. *Social Policy & Administration*, 33(3), 245–261.
- Downward, P., & Mearman, A. (2007). Retrodution as mixed-methods triangulation in economic research: Reorienting economics into social science. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(1), 77–99.
- Driessens, K., & Geldof, D. (2009). Individu en/of structuur? Of wat wil het sociaal werk aanpakken? In J. Steyaert & W. en Verzelen (Eds.), *Canon van het sociaal werk in Vlaanderen*. Retrieved from <https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/essays/Driessens%20Geldof%20-%20Individu%20en%20of%20structuur.pdf>

- Emerson, R. (2004). Working with key incidents. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 457–472). London: Sage.
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry: QI*, 12(2), 219–245.
- Franks, M. (2011). Pockets of participation: Revisiting child-centred participation research. *Children & Society*, 25, 15–25.
- Fraser, N. (1989). Talking about needs: Interpretative contests as political conflicts in welfare-state societies. *Ethics*, 99(2), 291–313.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition. Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 212, 68–93.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Fraser, N. (2008). Abnormal justice. *Critical Inquiry*, 34(3), 393–422.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Garrett, P.M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(5), 1517–1533.
- Gray, M., & Webb, S.A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(1), 111–115.

- Gupta, A. (2017). Learning from others: An autoethnographic exploration of children and families social work, poverty and the capability approach. *Qualitative Social Work*, 16(4), 449–464.
- Gupta, A., Blumhardt, H., & ATD Fourth World (2017). Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: The contribution of 'the politics of recognition and respect'. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 17 February 2017. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2017.1287669
- Handler, J.F. (2003). Social citizenship and workfare in the US and Western Europe: From status to contract. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 13(3), 229–243.
- Hermans, K. (2012). Structureel sociaal werk. Strijden tegen sociale ongelijkheid. *Alert*, 38(1), 8–14.
- Holemans, D. (2014). Van de politiek naar het politieke, van het haalbare naar het noodzakelijke. *Oikos*, 69(2), 4–18.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Jordan, B. (2008). Social work and world poverty. *International Social Work*, 51(4), 440–452.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2009). From voice to knowledge: Participatory action research, inclusive debate and feminism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(3), 279–295.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty, *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty and the political: Wresting the political out of and into social work theory, research and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(6), 811–822.
- Lister, R. (2002). A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision making that affects their lives. *Social Policy & Society*, 1(1), 37–46.

- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lister, R. (2013). 'Power, not pity': Poverty and human rights. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), 109–123.
- Lorenz, W. (2004). *Towards a European paradigm of social work – Studies in the history of modes of social work and social policy in Europe* (Doctoral dissertation). Dresden: Fakultät Erziehungswissenschaften der Technischen Universität Dresden.
- Lorenz, W. (2007). Practicing history. Memory and contemporary professional practice. *International Social Work*, 50(5), 597–612.
- Lorenz, W. (2014). *The need for a new social question*. Public lecture given at Ghent University on 20th March 2014.
- Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 4–17.
- Lorenz, W. (2017). European policy developments and their impact on social work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(1), 17–28.
- Maesele, T. (2012). *From charity to welfare rights? A study of social care practices* (Doctoral dissertation). Ghent: Ghent University.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social practitioners as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Mehta, L. (2008). Over the rainbow: The politics of researching citizenship and marginality. *Action Research*, 6(2), 233–253.
- Mestrum, F. (2011). Child poverty. A critical perspective. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 161–168.
- Millar, M. (2008). Anti-oppressiveness: Critical comments on a discourse and its context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 362–375.
- Mullaly, B. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Canada: Oxford University Press.

- Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: continuity and change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ragin, C.C., & Amoroso, L.M. (2011). *Constructing social research. The unity and diversity of method*. London: Sage.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or Pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy & Administration*, 46(7), 807–822.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social work: In search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592–1607.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., Schiettecat, T., Pannecoucke, B., Piessens, A., Van Gils, J., & Vandekinderen, C. (2016). Social work research as a practice of transparency. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(6), 1021–1034.
- Saar-Heiman, Y., Lavie-Ajayi, M., & Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty-aware social work practice: Service users' perspectives. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22, 1054–1063.
- Sayer, R.A. (2005). *The moral significance of class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). *Paradigmatische verschuivingen en methodologische discussie in (kinder)armoedeonderzoek* [VLAS-Studies 16]. Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2015). Do families in poverty need child and family social work? *European Journal of Social Work*, 18(5), 647–660.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2017). Capturing life histories about movements into and out of poverty: A road with pits and bumps. *Qualitative Social Work*, Advance access published 31 January 2017. doi:10.1177/1473325016674545.
- Stepney, P. (2006). Mission impossible? Critical practice in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(8), 1289–1307.

- Thompson, S. (2009). On the circularity of democratic justice. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 35(9), 1079–1098.
- Vandekinderen, C., Roose, R., Raeymaeckers, P., & Hermans, K. (2018). *Sociaal Werk Conferentie 2018. Sterk sociaal werk: Eindrapport*. Retrieved from <https://www.departementwvg.be/sites/default/files/media/documenten/Eindrapport.pdf>
- Vandenbroeck, M., Coussée, F., & Bradt, L. (2010). The social and political construction of early childhood education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(2), 139–153.
- Van Ewijk, H. (2010). *Maatschappelijk werk in een sociaal gevoelige tijd*. Amsterdam: Humanistic University Press. Retrieved from https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/1994_wetenschap_leerstool/2010%20Hans%20van%20Ewijk%20Maatschappelijk%20werk%20in%20een%20sociaal%20gevoelige%20tijd.pdf
- Villadsen, K. (2007). The emergence of 'neo-philanthropy': A new discursive space in welfare policy? *Acta Sociologica*, 50(3), 309–323.
- Webb, S.A. (2010). (Re)assembling the left. The politics of redistribution and recognition in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2364–2379.
- Webb, S.A. (2014). *Social work and the politics of recognition*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/4489946/Social_Work_and_the_Politics_of_Recognition
- Zizek, S. (2000). *The ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology*. London: Verso.

English summary

Since its early days, social work has been a discipline and profession committed to the fight against poverty (Payne, 2005). In this fight, it has always been caught in the complexity of whether it should be committed to integrating the individual in a situation of poverty into society or to realising societal change (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; De Corte & Roose, 2018; Driessens & Geldof, 2009; Lorenz, 2016).

While social work defines its own role as being concerned with the empowerment of service users as well as with societal change and issues of social justice (IFSW, 2014), this appears not to be evident for social work practice. On the one side, social work has often been critiqued for taking on one-sided caring and compensating strategies, and for being 'a dog that did not bark' (Jordan & Jordan, 2000) while it adjusted itself to the retrenchment of the welfare state in issues of social care and justice (Mullaly, 2007). In doing so, social work itself contributed to the individualisation of the problem of poverty by developing practices that mainly focused on integrating people into the dominant society (Davis & Wainwright, 2003; Hermans, 2012; Roose *et al.*, 2012). In such an approach, the participation of people in poverty in and through social work practice merely becomes a way of empowering people to learn to overcome their own powerlessness so as to integrate into society rather than of advancing transformative goals towards a more participatory and just society (Baistow, 2000; Garrett, 2010; Roets *et al.*, 2012). Many authors have therefore promoted a more critical stance of the profession that attempts to put the fight for social justice and social transformation in the foreground again (e.g. Carey & Foster, 2011; Ferguson, 2008; Fook, 2002; Gray & Webb, 2009; Lorenz, 2016). Where the participation of people in poverty in this proposed critical stance does not serve such an instrumental goal, it is nevertheless pointed out that they may run the danger of oversimplifying the complex relationship between structural oppression and the experiences of people themselves and their need to find a place in society (Millar, 2008). As such, these strategies might then abandon or give little attention to interpersonal relationships (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). As such, it is not clear how the quest for a critical and political stance in social work relates to the specific needs, concerns and aspirations for growth of individuals within contemporary society (Hermans, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Millar, 2008).

It is therefore stated that the 'pedagogical perspective' on social work needs to be deepened (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Lorenz, 2016) in order to gain a more concrete understanding of how social work practice and practitioners can try to engage in the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the

aspirations and concerns of people in poverty, while also trying to stimulate social justice and societal change. A pedagogical perspective on social work first and foremost implies that social work practices are not neutral, but are to be considered as intentional educational interventions in the socialisation of individuals (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). While being committed to social justice, such a perspective in social work practices engaged in the fight against poverty thus not only entail a neutral question for practitioners on how they can 'do things right' in methodical ways, but starts with a value-loaded question or exercise of how practitioners can engage in continuous reflection on 'doing right things' (Biesta, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). In this reflection, the inherent complexity of trying to connect individual experiences, needs and concerns to the broader socio-political level should not be ignored (Vandenbroeck, 2010). As such, the primary role for social work practice in the fight against poverty is therefore not about complying with the direct needs of people in poverty or about one-sidedly determining how people in poverty can be socialised into society, but about creating opportunities to reflect collaboratively on the different perspectives on what social justice might mean while making sure that the perspectives of people in poverty are included in the public debate (Biesta, 2014, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Freire, 1970, 1972; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). From such an understanding, we have stressed the importance of a pedagogical approach to social problems, such as poverty and social inequality, as a 'pedagogy of combatting poverty'.

From a belief that issues of poverty can only be fully understood when theoretical knowledge is merged with practical and life knowledge (Krumer-Nevo, 2009; Roose *et al.*, 2016; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2014), a participatory research approach was considered to be vital from the beginning of the research, in which the research team attempted to create openness to collaboratively discuss and reflect on the research questions, methodology and preliminary findings together with practitioners and participants. The whole research process was also guided by a 'retroductive approach' (Downward & Mearman, 2007; Emerson, 2004; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011), in which theoretical concepts and ideas and empirical data interplayed with each other constantly. Such an approach gave recognition to the knowledge that the research team gathered during the research process. This implies that conceptual and theoretical ideas inspired the empirical research, research questions and data analysis, but also that the findings generated some key elements in reflecting on such a pedagogy of combatting poverty, which in their turn needed new theoretical input and raised additional

research questions. Consequently, different interconnected and evolving layers can be discovered in the dissertation.

In chapter 1, we introduce our research topic, problem statement and questions, while explaining that this research starts with a conceptualisation of poverty as a 'structural participation problem'. While poverty is evidently about material deprivation, it also implies a lack of opportunities to acquire social and cultural capital and to effectuate political and social rights. People in poverty are granted a marginal and passive position in society and suffer a lack of resources, due recognition and institutional power to influence their subordinated position (Doom, 2003; see also Fraser, 1995, 2005; Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2009, 2016; Lister, 2004, 2013). As such, their power to actively shape their own situation is taken away, which may lead to acquiescence in this situation (Freire, 1970). Consequently, poverty is inevitably and deeply embedded in issues of power, societal exclusion and participation through which people in poverty have little power to participate in defining what poverty is and in reflecting on what measures should be set up to combat it (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2003; Lister, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012).

Committed to such a conceptualisation of poverty and the involvement of social work in advancing social justice, the complexity for social work to engage with the tension between securing and changing the underlying assumptions of the social order is theorised in chapter 2, drawing on Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice. She states that a society is just when, and only when, 'parity of participation' is achieved for everyone. This implies that all members of society should be able to participate on a par and social arrangements should permit all to do so. She therefore advocates that we should fight injustices on the economic, political and cultural levels while identifying 'affirmative' (compensating measures but leaving the societal framework which generates the injustices intact) and 'transformative' (changing the way society works and restructuring the underlying frameworks) ways of doing so. Based on this theory, our central argument is that social work often tries to escape or ignore the complex nature of its engagement in the fight against poverty by sliding into one-sided affirmative or transformative anti-poverty strategies. Rather than trying to find ways to escape from these tensions and ambiguities, social work should attempt to embrace reflexively the inherent tensions in which it is caught when dealing with the problem of poverty. From this stance, a role for social work is the creation of 'cultural forums' in which private concerns can be translated into public concerns, through which public debate about the problem of poverty is stimulated. In such forums, the various concerns, experiences, aspirations and

claims of injustice of people in poverty can be discovered and discussed on a par, and projected and represented in society, enabling different perspectives on the problem of poverty to be brought into the debate.

While this chapter engages with the question of how social work can deal with the inherent complexity of recognising and meeting the aspirations and concerns of people in poverty while trying to stimulate societal change on a conceptual level, the ambition of this dissertation is not only situated on a theoretical level, but also aims to broaden the empirical understanding of the shaping of and complexities in such a pedagogy of combatting poverty. A major part of this dissertation therefore builds on our empirical research in one specific case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Mortelmans, 2007), namely 'Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice' [APRVs].

APRVs have been formally acknowledged by the Flemish Government since 2003, from a consideration that the participation of people in poverty in social policy making and social work practice should be formally supported by the welfare state. The Poverty Decree (2003) requires that to be subsidised, APRVs fulfil six diverse criteria: 1) continue to seek out people in poverty, 2) enable people in poverty to form an organisation, 3) give a voice to people in poverty, 4) work towards their social emancipation, 5) change social structures, and 6) create dialogue and training activities to enhance the solidarity between people in poverty and the non-poor. There are currently 59 APRVs in Flanders, coordinated by one umbrella organisation, the Network Against Poverty (<http://www.netwerktegenarmoede.be/>). In almost all APRVs, paid practitioners take on the overall responsibility of shaping daily practices. However, exceptionally, volunteers also take on this responsibility due to the choices made by the organisations in deploying their limited resources or as a consequence of their historical background. 'Practitioners' therefore broadly refers to people who receive an organisational mandate to take on responsibility in actively shaping organisational policy and practice, be it paid or on a voluntary basis. Additionally, in shaping daily practices almost all APRVs work with volunteers in some shape or form (be it with or without a background of poverty experience), who take on more limited tasks without the formal responsibility. APRVs are inspired by the idea that poverty is "a complex set of instances of social exclusion that stretches out over numerous areas of individual and collective existence" (Vranken, 2001, p. 86). As such, poverty is considered to be related to a lack of resources as well as to the limited opportunities for people in poverty to participate in various social areas such as income, labour and public services. In their work, the participation of people in poverty is consequently a guiding principle and goal, asserting that

“in the fight against poverty, it is important that everybody can participate on an equal basis in society and that society is questioned when this equilibrium is imposed” (Network against Poverty, n.d., own translation). APRVs thus attempt to pursue social justice and social change in close collaboration with people in poverty, with participatory principles and practices being central to their endeavours (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2003).

By creating space for critical engagement with the unjust nature of the individual as well as collective experiences of people in poverty, APRVs may open up opportunities to create forums in which different lifeworlds and stories can be exchanged and made public (Boone *et al.*, 2018a). As such, APRVs provide a highly relevant ‘critical case study’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006) for deriving an in-depth understanding of how social work practice and practitioners can engage in a pedagogy of combatting poverty and attempt to pursue social justice and societal change from a commitment to the participation of and collaboration with people in poverty.

In the first empirical study of those organisations undertaken for this dissertation, we aimed to gain an in-depth insight into the tensions, bottlenecks and complexities in relation to social justice that practitioners experience in their commitment to such participatory principles and practices.

In this study, 24 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 32 practitioners from 24 APRVs, with more than one practitioner taking part in some interviews. 27 of the respondents were paid employees, one was a coordinator with poverty-experience, and four were voluntary practitioners without poverty experience. In four interviews, practitioners were accompanied by additional respondents to give further insight into the organisation: the chairpersons of two APRVs and five participants with experience of poverty from two APRVs. After an analysis of this data, five focus group meetings were additionally constructed with the objective of gaining more specific in-depth knowledge. A diversity of organisations and practitioners took part, varying in individual and organisational background, types of activity, size of organisation and involvement of people in poverty. Practitioners of 22 APRVs and of two local collective umbrella organisations (amongst whom the representatives also had active experience in and links to one or more organisation) participated: ten APRVs had already been interviewed in the first cluster, whereas twelve APRVs and the two umbrella organisations were not represented in the semi-structured interviews. Here, 25 practitioners and eight participants with experience of poverty who joined a

practitioner participated in the focus groups. As such, 36 organisations (and two local umbrella organisations) of the 59 APRVs took part in the study.

The main findings of this study are discussed in chapter 3 of the dissertation. By relying on the work of Nancy Fraser, light is shed on the complexities of the 'how', the 'who' and the 'what' of social justice that arise in these participatory practices. In relation to the 'how' of social justice, the dominant dialogue method of shaping a politics of representation entails complexity and exclusionary effects in practice. Practitioners in the APRVs acknowledge that this method enhances hierarchical mechanisms that exclude the most powerless, yet in their attempt to create alternative and indirect forms of representation, the individual and collective injustices experienced by people in poverty are sometimes interpreted, selected, and reframed for them rather than with them. In relation to shaping the 'who' of social justice, APRV-practitioners seem to question the feasibility of participatory parity for all people in poverty in formal decision-making or consultative bodies and organise this politics of representation in a way that often results in a selection of who is able to participate. This hierarchy often remains invisible, yet may allow only a selective and privileged delegation of representatives to become the embodiment of what it implies to be living in poverty. Nevertheless, in attempting to overcome such hierarchies by making sure that everyone's voice is influential in APRVs, practitioners sometimes get lost in the sheer complexity of the task. In relation to the 'what' of social justice, the dual focus of APRVs on empowering people in poverty and enhancing structural change leads in practice to tensions between affirmative and transformative strategies. This shows that the premise of parity of participation can be in sharp contrast with the quest for structural change, leading to the danger of decoupling the participation of people in poverty in transformative strategies.

In order to attempt to gain a more in-depth insight into how practitioners can develop pedagogical strategies that engage with these complexities, a second empirical research study was conducted with APRVs.

Here, participant observation research (Neuman, 2010; Van Hove & Claes, 2011) was conducted in five APRVs, which were selected on the basis of five criteria: a) their location in the different provinces of Flanders and their diversity in terms of urban and rural environments, b) their origins, c) the number of paid workers, d) the people they aimed to reach, and e) the sort of activities they conducted. To start off, participatory observations (n=80) were conducted in those organisations, ranging from low threshold meeting activities, to substantial

group work and to activities aimed at influencing public debate. These observations in turn inspired and provided guidance for in-depth interviews with different actors connected to the respective APRVs. Thirteen individual in-depth interviews with practitioners, ten group interviews with participants from those five organisations who were living in poverty (34 interviewees), two group interviews with volunteers from two of the organisations (nine interviewees) and two group interviews with local policy makers (six respondents) were conducted. In conclusion, focus groups (Van Hove & Claes, 2011) were organised to discuss some of the findings with practitioners (two focus groups, n=13 practitioners from thirteen APRVs) and with people in poverty (one focus group, n= 6 respondents from three APRVs).

While reflecting on a pedagogy of combatting poverty and on how practitioners can act on the complexities in their work, three main elements arose out of the interplay between the data and our conceptual framework in the second research phase:

- Linking strength-based and empowering environments to structural and transformative objectives;
- Stimulating the development of critical consciousness amongst people in poverty about the collective and unjust nature of poverty;
- Dealing with the complexities of the direct participation of people in poverty while representing their perspectives and concerns in public debate.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 we engage with *these elements*.

In chapter 4, the question of how social work practitioners create environments that enable the recognition and equal worth of people in poverty while connecting such practices to the broader socio-political context is tackled. Here, the vital importance of practitioners in shaping such environments is stressed, in which it is revealed that the recognition and empowerment of people in poverty is not only enabled through the creation of niches in which participants are addressed on their strengths in daily practice, but also through the conception of the transformative potential of such niches, in which people in poverty are positioned as indispensable active partners in the fight against injustice. Nevertheless, the complexity of denouncing the socio-economic and political subordination of people in poverty without defining people in poverty by their status – which might

lead to their misrecognition – also comes to the surface. While reflecting on differences that lead to the subordination of people in poverty must remain at the heart of social work practice, they should, however, be framed as a communicative basis for creating solidarity for and indignation about the unjust nature of the daily struggles people in poverty have to endure.

In chapter 5 we dig deeper into the question whether subordinated minorities, such as people in poverty, are best placed to engage actively in the struggle for social justice, since it is important to take into account that “members of subordinated groups commonly internalise need interpretations that work to their own disadvantage” (Fraser, 1989, p. 299). Here, we address the question of how social workers can actively engage people in poverty who have been subject to processes of alienation and internalisation in the struggle for societal change and what the complexities are in these strategies. We do this by drawing on the vital ideas of Paulo Freire with regard to the development of a pedagogy and participatory praxis that takes into account, yet also transcends, processes of internalisation and alienation in social work practice and engages in breaking a ‘culture of silence’. As such, we show that practitioners play an important role in stimulating critical consciousness by actively bringing knowledge of regulations, rights, institutions and the wider society into play, by reframing poverty as a collective concern and by connecting experiences of people in poverty to a structural analysis and as such stimulate indignation about the unjust nature of poverty. We also shed light on how the participatory and dialogical beliefs and ideas of Freire relate to the power position of the practitioners in APRVs, since practitioners use power in intentional ways, but also frequently ‘mask’ or ‘disguise’ their own power. It is therefore argued that power asymmetries in these practices should be acknowledged and openly discussed in ways that enable a critical consciousness to flourish, amongst people in poverty as well as practitioners and society at large.

In chapter 6 of this dissertation, we engage in the complexity of the representation of the experiences, perspectives and claims of people in poverty in public debate. Here, we aim to gain deeper insight into the worth, complexities and tensions of the direct participation of people in poverty in such processes and how this complexity relates to the role of social practitioners of those organisations in trying to bring about societal change. As such, two roles of APRV-practitioners are discussed. In one, the direct participation of people in poverty appears to be the guiding principle and the practitioner is then ‘a guardian of collective and transformative elements’ in these processes. In the other, the ambition of societal change comes more prominently into the

foreground with the practitioners conceiving their own role as a 'strategic chess player' in bringing about change. Since the direct participation of people in poverty in such representation processes is showed to be possibly counter-productive for the aim of achieving societal change, it is concluded that there is a need for practitioners who are able to reflect critically on participatory premises in processes of representation, though that such strategic considerations should always be collaboratively discussed with people in poverty.

In the concluding chapter, we provide some general conclusions.

Firstly, this research may provide food for thought for future researchers in the field of poverty and in how social work can take on its role in the fight against poverty. Here, it may be important to convey the idea that research cannot take on a neutral stance, but rather should position itself in relation to questions of how to conceive the problem of poverty; what sort of questions will be asked in the research; how and to what extent research participants are active co-designers of the research; and how to interpret and represent findings throughout the research (Krumer-Nevo, 2017; Roose *et al.*, 2015). In times of challenging socio-political and economic circumstances, research is not only part of these contexts, but can choose to affirm or question contemporary problem definitions (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015) and actively commit to the promotion of social justice, societal transformation and the participation of people in poverty. From such a commitment, it is vital to be transparent about the choices made during the research process and the grounds for those choices, while at the same time embracing the uncertain, fluid and sporadic nature of the process. As such, making committed choices in research should go hand in hand with an openness to re-evaluating those choices, choosing on the spot or just letting things happen.

In relation to what this research might imply for social work practices, a key conclusion is that even social work practices that are fully dedicated to the principle of parity of participation while engaging in the fight against poverty, power asymmetries and social inequalities nevertheless come to the surface (Boone *et al.*, 2018b). While these issues and questions have no easy or straightforward answers, they do expose the fact that people in poverty are in a fundamental 'reality of imparity of participation', since they are excluded on the economic, cultural and political levels, which impedes their full participation in society, societal institutions and thus also social work practices.

This consequently requires that social work practices and practitioners engage with imparity of participation in one way or another. Taking on a 'heroic belief'

that imparity in all its complexity can be overcome (Marston & McDonald, 2012) leaves social workers disappointed and frustrated. Consequently, it may be more relevant to promote a different stance, in which the imparity of people in poverty is embraced as a problematic but inherent part of practice. Taking on such a stance implies that social workers should conceive their own pedagogical role as 'learning to become reflexive chess players' in the complex field of recognising the needs and concerns of people in poverty while aiming for societal transformation. Rather than being the expert and ultimate strategist, the social worker can see his/her role as an enabler of a joint and collaborative reflection and dialogue about the complexity of trying to engage in the fight against poverty without knowing what the outcome will be of the actions and strategies that are taken on. By committing to the creation of forums that provide the space for collaborative reflection on experiences and issues of injustice in the political, economic and cultural domains (Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b; Fraser, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008), potential is also created to dialogue about difference, power and subordination together with people in poverty in practice itself. This consequently implies that practitioners should learn to see, accept and acknowledge the power imbalances due to the imparity of people in poverty as not only a societal issue, but also as an inherent part of their own participatory practices that aim to transform society. Rather than trying to heroically resolve this challenge (and fail), it implies that social workers should actively engage, together with people in poverty, in constant reflection on what participation at a certain time, for certain individuals in the light of a certain goal might imply.

While being aware that the power of people in poverty and of social work practices to transform society may be limited, we have built on a metaphor of 'keep on rolling the dice'. Here the committed social worker may be the one who actively embraces the uncertainty of how the dice will fall – or of how the chess game may evolve – as well as the one who takes the result of every game – whether it is winning or losing in terms of the game rules – as a chance to engage in collaborative learning opportunities together with people in poverty on what the game in itself and the result of the game imply for people in poverty as well as for the debate on poverty. Through the persistent and collaborative efforts to create forums in which the needs, perspectives, concerns and claims of injustice of people in poverty are discussed and collectivised, but also by representing these claims in the wider society, society can be questioned from the principle of social justice (Boone *et al.*, 2018a). This implies that social work practices and practitioners, as well as people in poverty, should be committed to 'the art of the impossible' (Biesta, 2014; Debaene, 2018; De Bruyne & Bouchaute, 2014; Holemans, 2014), in which continuous efforts should be made to confront society

with the distance between the claim for parity of participation by people in poverty and the reality of their imparity of participation. This will hopefully contribute to dialogue and reflection about how this reality can be altered towards greater participatory parity and social justice, while at the same time appreciating that all moments of interruption and its following reformulated answers will in turn be flawed and need disruption in the name of parity and justice (Roose *et al.*, 2012).

References

- Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness. Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.
- Biesta, G. (2014). Learning in public spaces: Civic learning for the twenty-first century. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 1–11). London: Springer.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Claeys, A., & Vanhee, J. (2003). *Armoede en participatie*. Ghent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek. Een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk*. Ghent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Roose, R., Coussée, F., & Bradt, L. (2014). Learning democracy in social work. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 43–54). London: Springer.
- Carey, M., & Foster, V. (2011). Introducing 'deviant' social work: Contextualising the limits of radical social work whilst understanding (fragmented) resistance

within the social work labour process. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(3), 576–593.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davis, A., & Wainwright, S. (2003). Combatting poverty and social exclusion: Implications for social work education. *Social Work Education*, 24(3), 259–273.

Debaene, R. (2018). *Een democratie heeft nood aan sociaal werk. Vrijheid en gelijkheid staan centraal*. Retrieved from <https://sociaal.net/analyse-xl/een-democratie-heeft-nood-aan-sociaal-werk/>

De Bruyne, P., & Van Bouchaute, B. (2014). De bestaande orde verstoren. Over de politieke opdracht van het middenveld. *Oikos*, 69(2), 19–31.

De Corte, J., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work as a policy actor: Understanding social policy as an open-ended democratic practice. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 20 April 2018. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1462768.

Doom, R. (2003). Armoede: Een essay van de open deur. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock, & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 245–272). Ghent: Academia Press.

Downward, P., & Mearman, A. (2007). Retrodution as mixed-methods triangulation in economic research: Reorienting economics into social science. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(1), 77–99.

Driessens, K., & Geldof, D. (2009). Individu en/of structuur? Of wat wil het sociaal werk aanpakken? In J. Steyaert & W. Verzelen, *Canon van het sociaal Werk in Vlaanderen*. Retrieved from <https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/essays/Driessens%20Geldof%20-%20Individu%20en%20of%20structuur.pdf>

Emerson, R. (2004). Working with key incidents. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 457–472). London: Sage.

Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.

- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry: QI*, 12(2), 219–245.
- Fook, J. (2002). *Social work: Critical theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Fraser, N. (1989). Talking about needs: Interpretative contests as political conflicts in welfare-state societies. *Ethics*, 99(2), 291–313.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Garrett, P.M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 1517–1533.
- Gray, M., & Webb, S.A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(1), 111–115.
- Hermans, K. (2012). Structureel sociaal werk. Strijden tegen sociale ongelijkheid. *Alert*, 38(1), 8–14.
- Holemans, D. (2014). Van de politiek naar het politieke, van het haalbare naar het noodzakelijke. *Oikos*, 69(2), 4–18.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Jordan, B., & Jordan, C. (2000). *Social work and the third way: Tough love as social policy*. London: Sage Publications.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2005). Listening to 'life knowledge': A new research direction in poverty studies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 99–106.

- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2009). From voice to knowledge: Participatory action research, inclusive debate and feminism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(3), 279–295.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty and the political: Wrestling the political out of and into social work theory, research and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(6), 811–822.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lister, R. (2013). 'Power, not pity': Poverty and human rights. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), 109–123.
- Lorenz, W. (2014). *The need for a new social question*. Public lecture given at Ghent University on 20th March 2014.
- Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 4–17.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social practitioners as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Millar, M. (2008). Anti-oppressiveness: Critical comments on a discourse and its context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 362–375.
- Mortelmans, D. (2007). *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*. Leuven: Acco.
- Mullaly, B. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Network against Poverty. (n.d.). *Gewoon mens mogen zijn!* Retrieved from <http://netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Visietekst-Vlaams-Netwerk.pdf>
- Neuman, W.L. (2010). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

- Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ragin, C.C., & Amoroso, L.M. (2011). *Constructing social research. The unity and diversity of method*. London: Sage.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy and Administration*, 46, 807–822.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social work: In search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592–1607.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., Schiettecat, T., Pannecoucke, B., Piessens, A., Van Gils, J., & Vandekinderen, C. (2016). Social work research as a practice of transparency. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(6), 1021–1034.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). *Paradigmatische verschuivingen en methodologische discussie in (kinder)armoedeonderzoek* [VLAS-Studies 16]. Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.
- Van Hove, G., & Claes, L. (2011). *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Vranken, J. (2001). Unravelling the social strands of poverty: Differentiation, fragmentation, inequality, and exclusion. In H.T. Andersen & R. Van Kempen (Eds.), *Governing European cities. Social fragmentation, social exclusion, and urban governance* (pp. 71– 88). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Wilson, A., & Beresford, P. (2000). 'Anti-oppressive practice': Emancipation or appropriation? *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(5), 553–573.

Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Een blik op de geschiedenis toont hoe de spanning tussen de integratie van personen in armoede in de samenleving en het veranderen van deze samenleving vervat zit in het DNA van sociaal werk (Payne, 2005; Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Driessens & Geldof, 2009; Lorenz, 2016; De Corte & Roose, 2018). Sociaal werk definieert zichzelf als betrokken op zowel het empoweren van individuen als op het nastreven van sociale verandering en sociale rechtvaardigheid (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). Dit blijkt echter geen evidente opdracht. Een veelgehoorde kritiek is dat sociaal werk vervalt in zorgende strategieën die louter een doekje zijn voor het bloeden, terwijl de huidige welvaarstaat zich in toenemende mate terugtrekt uit sociale rechtvaardigheidskwesties (Jordan & Jordan, 2000; Mullaly, 2007). Door te investeren in praktijken die zich vooral focussen op de integratie van kwetsbare individuen en groepen in de huidige samenleving draagt sociaal werk op die manier zelf bij tot de individualisering van het armoedeprobleem (Hermans, 2012; Davis & Wainwright, 2003; Roets *et al.*, 2012; Roose *et al.*, 2012). In dergelijke praktijken is de participatie van mensen in armoede voornamelijk een instrument om de machteloosheid van mensen te overwinnen, zodat ze zich kunnen aanpassen aan de norm van de huidige samenleving. Hierdoor verdwijnt het transformatieve ideaal en potentieel van sociaal werkpraktijken om naar een meer participatieve en rechtvaardige samenleving te streven uit beeld (Baistow, 2000; Garrett, 2010; Roets *et al.*, 2012). Om die reden schuiven heel wat auteurs een meer kritische opvatting van sociaal werk naar voor, waarin het belang van de strijd voor sociale rechtvaardigheid en transformatie van de samenleving centraal staat (vb. Fook, 2002; Ferguson, 2008; Gray & Webb, 2009; Carey & Foster, 2011; Lorenz, 2016). Hoewel het duidelijk is dat participatie van mensen in armoede in dergelijke kritische benaderingen geen instrumenteel integratiedoel dient, wordt door verschillende auteurs de bezorgdheid geuit dat deze benaderingen op hun beurt dan weer te snel voorbijgaan aan de complexiteit van het leven in armoede (Millar, 2008; Wilson and Beresford, 2000; Roose *et al.*, 2012). Bijgevolg blijft het tot op heden onduidelijk hoe de zoektocht naar en het streefdoel van een kritische en politiserende houding in sociaal werkpraktijken, verbonden kan worden met de specifieke noden, bezorgdheden en aspiraties van mensen om zich te verhouden tot de samenleving waarin ze leven (Millar, 2008; Hermans, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2016 & 2017).

Op basis van het bovenstaande wordt beargumenteerd dat het 'pedagogisch perspectief' op sociaal werk in relatie tot armoedebestrijding verdiept moet worden (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Lorenz, 2016) om zo meer inzicht te

krijgen in de wijze waarop sociaal werkpraktijken en sociaal werkers zich kunnen verhouden tot de complexiteit om enerzijds de directe noden, bezorgdheden en aspiraties van mensen in armoede te honoreren en anderzijds sociale rechtvaardigheid en sociale verandering na te streven. Een pedagogisch perspectief betekent in de eerste plaats dat sociaal werkpraktijken nooit neutraal zijn, maar steeds intentionele tussenkomsten in het socialisatieproces betreffen (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). Vanuit de ambitie van sociale rechtvaardigheid betekent een verdieping van het pedagogisch perspectief daarom dat sociaal werkers niet enkel gefocust moeten zijn op de methodische vraag hoe men de 'dingen juist kan doen', maar moeten starten vanuit de vraag hoe ze zich kunnen engageren in de continue reflectie over hoe men 'juiste dingen kan doen' (Biesta, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). De voornaamste opdracht voor praktijken bestaat in die zin dan ook niet zozeer uit het aansluiten bij de directe noden van mensen in armoede, noch bij de eenzijdige bepaling hoe mensen geïntegreerd raken in deze samenleving, maar wel uit het creëren van mogelijkheden om gezamenlijk te reflecteren over de verschillende perspectieven op wat sociale rechtvaardigheid kan betekenen. Belangrijk is dat de perspectieven van mensen in armoede in dit debat een plaats krijgen (Biesta, 2014, 2018; Bouverne-De Bie, 2015; Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2014; Freire, 1970, 1972; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010;). Vertrekkende vanuit die opvatting wil dit proefschrift bijdragen tot de theoretische en empirische kennis over hoe sociaal werkers deze pedagogische rol kunnen vormgeven, of in andere woorden, hoe sociaal werkpraktijken zich kunnen engageren tot een 'pedagogie van armoedebestrijding' waarin de participatie van mensen in armoede centraal staat.

Vanuit een geloof dat armoedekwesties enkel kunnen begrepen worden vanuit een kruisbestuiving tussen theoretische kennis en kennis vanuit de praktijk en vanuit ervaring (Krumer-Nevo, 2009; Schiettecat *et al.*, 2014; Roose *et al.*, 2016), werden er van begin tot einde pogingen ondernomen en participatieve mogelijkheden geschapen om gezamenlijk te reflecteren over het onderzoeksproces. Het hele onderzoeksproces werd bovendien ook vormgegeven vanuit een 'retroductieve aanpak' (Emerson, 2004; Downward & Mearman, 2007; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011), waarbij erkenning wordt gegeven aan de kennis die het onderzoeksteam opbouwt gedurende het onderzoeksproces. Dergelijke aanpak betekent dat doorheen het onderzoeksproces theoretische concepten en ideeën en empirische data en analyses continu op elkaar inspelen. Dit betekent dat de keuzes inzake conceptuele en theoretische perspectieven inspirerend waren voor het empirisch onderzoek, de onderzoeksvragen en de data-analyse, maar ook dat reflectie op de bevindingen op hun beurt nieuwe

elementen blootlegden. Op die manier werd er ruimte gecreëerd voor nieuwe theoretische perspectieven en bijkomende, verdiepende onderzoeksvragen die tijdens het proces opdoken. In dit proefschrift kunnen bijgevolg verschillende - op elkaar voortbouwende - lagen ontdekt worden, die hieronder besproken worden.

In hoofdstuk 1 introduceren we het onderzoekonderwerp, de algemene probleemstelling en de onderzoeksvragen. Hierbij duiden we ook dat het onderzoek start vanuit een conceptualisatie van armoede als 'een structureel participatieprobleem'. Armoede duidt immers niet alleen op materiële deprivatie, maar ook op een gebrek aan mogelijkheden om sociaal en cultureel kapitaal te verwerven alsook om politieke en sociale rechten te verwerkelijken. Mensen in armoede hebben een passieve en marginale positie in deze samenleving door een gebrek aan materiële middelen, culturele erkenning en politieke representatie (Doom, 2003, Fraser, 1995, 2005; Lister, 2004; 2013; Krumer-Nevo, 2005; 2009; 2016). Dit betekent dat mensen in armoede de macht wordt ontnomen of hen de macht ontbreekt om hun eigen situatie actief vorm te geven, wat kan leiden tot een eigen cultuurpatroon en zelfs berusting in deze armoedesituatie (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Freire, 1970, 1972). Dit zorgt ervoor dat mensen in armoede weinig macht hebben om te participeren in de definitie van wat armoede is en in de reflectie over welke strategieën kunnen ingezet worden in de strijd tegen armoede. Op die manier is het armoedeprobleem onvermijdelijk en tot in de kern ingebed in machtsrelaties, sociale uitsluiting en participatie-vragen (Bouverne-De Bie *et al.*, 2003; Lister, 2004; Roets *et al.*, 2012).

Vertrekkend vanuit de conceptualisatie van het armoedeprobleem als een structureel participatieprobleem en het engagement van sociaal werk ten aanzien van sociale rechtvaardigheid, wordt in hoofdstuk 2 de complexiteit voor sociaal werkpraktijken om zich te verhouden op de spanning tussen het verzekeren en veranderen van de samenlevingsordening belicht. Hierbij werd inspiratie gevonden in de sociale rechtvaardigheidstheorie van Nancy Fraser, die stelt dat een samenleving sociaal rechtvaardig is wanneer, en enkel wanneer, er 'parity of participation' is. Dit wil zeggen dat iedereen de mogelijkheid heeft om gelijkwaardig te participeren aan het maatschappelijk leven. Fraser ijvert in haar werk voor het ontwikkelen van strategieën om de economische, culturele en politieke barrières die deze gelijkwaardigheid van participatie in de weg staan weg te werken. Deze strategieën kunnen 'affirmatief' zijn - wat betekent dat ze enkel een compenserend doel dienen zonder de onderliggende samenlevingsordening in vraag te stellen, of 'transformatief'—

waarbij ze er net op gericht zijn om de samenleving en haar onderliggende raamwerken in vraag te stellen en te veranderen. Gebaseerd op de theorie van Fraser, wordt beargumenteerd dat het huidige sociaal werk vaak antwoorden biedt die zich ofwel eenzijdig op de affirmatieve zijde ofwel op de transformatieve zijde bevinden. In beide benaderingen dreigt het gevaar dat sociaal werkers de inherente complexiteit van het sociaal werk – waarbij gewerkt wordt met de individuele leefwereld van mensen in armoede in een maatschappelijke context - negeren of proberen op te lossen. Als alternatieve houding bepleiten we het omarmen van deze inherente complexiteit. Hierbij kunnen sociaal werkpraktijken hun rol beschouwen als het creëren van ‘culturele fora’, waarbinnen private bekommernissen vertaald worden naar publieke vraagstukken. Door het werken met mensen in armoede ‘on a par’ kunnen noden, bezorgdheden en claims op het economische, politieke en culturele domein aan de oppervlakte komen. Door deze vervolgens te hertalen naar en representeren in de samenleving kunnen verschillende perspectieven op het armoedeprobleem in het publieke debat worden gebracht.

De ambitie van dit proefschrift ligt echter niet alleen in het ontwikkelen van een conceptueel raamwerk, maar ook in de wens om de empirische kennis inzake het vormgeven en omgaan met de complexiteit van dergelijke ondernemingen te vergroten. Daarom bouwt een groot deel van dit proefschrift op empirisch onderzoek in een specifieke case (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Mortelmans, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Creswell, 2013), namelijk ‘Verenigingen waar Armen het Woord Nemen’ (VwAhWN).

Verenigingen waar Armen het Woord Nemen zijn sinds 2003 formeel erkend door de Vlaamse Overheid, en staan sindsdien mede symbool voor een overheidsengagement in het realiseren van participatie van mensen in armoede in sociale beleidsvoering. Het Decreet betreffende de Armoedebestrijding (2003), bepaalt dat de verenigingen moeten voldoen aan zes criteria om erkend en gesubsidieerd te worden: 1) armen blijven zoeken, 2) armen samenbrengen in groep, 3) armen het woord geven, 4) werken aan de maatschappelijke emancipatie van armen, 5) werken aan maatschappelijke structuren en 6) vormingsactiviteiten en de maatschappelijke dialoog organiseren. Er zijn anno 2018 59 verenigingen in Vlaanderen en Brussel die gecoördineerd worden door het Netwerk tegen Armoede (www.netwerktegenarmoede.be). In nagenoeg alle verenigingen zijn één of meerdere betaalde krachten aan het werk die de algemene verantwoordelijkheid dragen voor het vormgeven van de praktijk. In uitzonderlijke gevallen nemen mensen deze taak op puur vrijwillige basis op. De notie ‘praktijkwerkers’ verwijst in dit geval dan ook naar de krachten in de

verenigingen die een organisatorisch mandaat krijgen om de algemene verantwoordelijkheid voor de dagelijkse werking van de organisatie waar te nemen, op betaalde of op vrijwillige basis. Naast deze praktijkwerkers, zijn er in bijna alle verenigingen vrijwilligers aan de slag die deeltaken opnemen, zonder deze formele verantwoordelijkheid. Dit zijn mensen met of zonder armoede-ervaring of een combinatie van beide. Verenigingen zijn geïnspireerd door de opvatting dat armoede “een netwerk van sociale uitsluitingen [is] dat zich uitstrekt over meerdere gebieden van het individuele en collectieve bestaan” (Vranken, 2001, p. 86). Armoede wordt dus zowel verbonden met een gebrek aan hulpbronnen als met de beperkte mogelijkheden van mensen in armoede om te participeren in diverse maatschappelijke gebieden zoals, werk, publieke dienstverlening etc... In het werk van de verenigingen wordt participatie dus gezien als beiden: leidend principe en maatschappelijk doel, waarbij men stelt dat het in de strijd tegen armoede essentieel is dat “iedereen gelijkwaardig kan deelnemen aan de samenleving en dat we de samenleving in vraag stellen wanneer die gelijkwaardigheid in het gedrang komt” (Netwerk tegen Armoede, z.d.). Verenigingen proberen dus sociale rechtvaardigheid en sociale verandering te realiseren in nauwe samenwerking met mensen in armoede, waarbij participatieve principes en praktijken centraal staan (Bouverne-De Bie, 2003).

Door plaatsen te voorzien voor een kritisch engagement ten aanzien van het onrecht dat besloten ligt in de individuele en collectieve ervaringen van mensen in armoede, creëren VwAhWN mogelijkheden voor culturele fora waarin diverse leefwerelden, verhalen en claims tot rechtvaardigheid uitgewisseld en in het publiek debat gebracht kunnen worden (Boone *et al.*, 2018a). Op die manier vormen deze verenigingen een uitermate relevante case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) om verdiepend inzicht te genereren in hoe sociaal werkpraktijken en sociaal werkers zich kunnen engageren tot een pedagogie van armoedebestrijding.

Een eerste empirische studie in deze verenigingen beoogde meer inzicht te krijgen in de spanningen en complexiteit in relatie tot sociale rechtvaardigheid die praktijkwerkers ervaren in hun engagement ten aanzien van participatieve principes en praktijken. Met dat doel werden 24 semi-gestructureerde interviews afgenomen van 32 praktijkwerkers uit 24 VwAhWN (aan sommige interviews nam meer dan één praktijkwerker deel). Daarvan waren er 27 respondenten betaalde krachten, vier waren vrijwillige krachten zonder armoede-ervaring en één was een vrijwillige coördinator met armoede-ervaring. In vier interviews werden praktijkwerkers vergezeld door bijkomende respondenten: twee voorzitters uit twee verenigingen, 1 vrijwilliger zonder armoede-ervaring, en vijf

participanten met armoede-ervaring uit twee verenigingen. Na een eerste analyse van de data uit de interviews werden vijf focusgroepen georganiseerd met als doel verdiepend inzicht in de ervaren complexiteit te verwerven. In totaal namen 25 praktijkwerkers en acht mensen met armoede-ervaring deel aan de focusgroepen, actief in 22 VwAhWN en twee lokale koepelinitiatieven (waarvan de vertegenwoordigers actieve ervaring hebben met één of meerdere organisaties). Hiervan waren tien verenigingen al vertegenwoordigd via de semi-gestructureerde interviews, twaalf andere en de twee koepelinitiatieven nog niet. Dit betekent dat 36 (en twee koepel-initiatieven) van de 59 verenigingen deelnamen aan deze studie.

De voornaamste bevindingen uit deze studie worden behandeld in hoofdstuk 3 van dit proefschrift. Voortbouwend op het werk van Nancy Fraser, wordt de complexiteit in relatie tot het 'hoe', het 'wat' en het 'wie' in participatieve representatie- praktijken belicht. In relatie tot het 'hoe' blijkt dat de dominante dialoogmethode in deze praktijken zorgt voor zeer veel complexiteit en uitsluitingsmechanismen in de praktijk. Waar praktijkwerkers erop wijzen dat deze methode hiërarchische mechanismen bewerkstelligt die zorgen voor de uitsluiting van de meest kwetsbaren, geven ze ook aan dat in het creëren van alternatieve en indirecte vormen van representatie evengoed machtsissues naar boven komen. In relatie tot het 'wie', wijzen praktijkwerkers op de moeilijkheid om elkeen te laten participeren in participatieve structureren en kanalen. Dat hierin keuzes gemaakt worden, is haast onvermijdelijk. Het gevaar is echter dat de selectiemechanismen onbesproken blijven en dat een selecte delegatie van vertegenwoordigers de vereenzelviging wordt van wat het betekent om te leven in armoede. In hun pogingen om dergelijke hiërarchie te overstijgen en ervoor te zorgen dat ieders stem even hard doorweegt in de vereniging, lopen praktijkwerkers vaak vast in de omslachtigheid en complexiteit van dit werk. In relatie tot het 'wat' van sociale rechtvaardigheid tenslotte rijzen spanningen tussen affirmatieve en transformatieve strategieën vanuit de pogingen van VwAhWN om zowel mensen te versterken en hun noden te erkennen als om structurele verandering na te streven. Deze studie legt bloot hoe het principe van gelijkwaardigheid van participatie in scherp contrast kan staan met de ambitie om sociale verandering na te streven, en hoe dit het risico inhoudt dat participatie van mensen in armoede losgekoppeld wordt van het nastreven van een structurele verandering van de samenleving.

In een poging om meer inzicht te krijgen in en kennis op te bouwen over hoe praktijkwerkers strategieën kunnen ontwikkelen in relatie tot deze complexiteit, werd een tweede studie in deze verenigingen verricht. Deze studie omvat een

participerend observatie-onderzoek (Neuman, 2010, Van Hove & Claes, 2011) in vijf concrete verenigingen. Deze werden geselecteerd op basis van vijf criteria: a) hun spreiding in Vlaanderen en diversiteit inzake landelijke en stedelijke context, b) een diversiteit in ontstaansgeschiedenis, c) een variatie in het aantal betaalde krachten, d) hun doelgroep en bereik, en e) het soort activiteiten die ze ondernemen. Na de selectie vonden verschillende participerende observaties (n=80) plaats in deze organisaties. Na een verkenningsfase in elke vereniging volgde een verdiepende observatie-fase van het handelen binnen specifieke activiteiten waarin de verbinding tussen de individuele, groepsmatige en maatschappelijke dimensie via participatieve processen met mensen in armoede centraal stond (vaak themabijeenkomsten of participatieve beslissingskanalen). Deze observaties vormden vervolgens de basis voor diepte-interviews met een betrokken aantal actoren. Zo werden dertien individuele diepte-interviews afgenomen van praktijkwerkers. Ook werden tien groepsinterviews afgenomen van participanten (n=34), twee groepsinterviews van vrijwilligers (n=9) en twee groepsinterviews met lokale beleidsmakers (n=6). Tot slot werden focusgroepen (Van Hove & Claes, 2011) georganiseerd om de bevindingen te kunnen bediscussiëren met een ruimere groep van praktijkwerkers (n= 2 focusgroepen, 13 respondenten van 13 verenigingen) en van mensen in armoede (n =1 focusgroep, 6 respondenten van 3 verenigingen).

Gezien de retroductieve aanpak het onderzoeksproces, zoals hierboven besproken, werd doorheen deze onderzoeksfase heen en weer bewogen tussen de data en het conceptueel raamwerk. Vanuit een reflectie op de rol van praktijkwerkers in het creëren van een pedagogie van armoedebestrijding in al zijn complexiteit, werden drie kernelementen onderscheiden:

- De connectie van versterkende omgevingen met structurele en transformatieve objectieven;
- Het aanscherpen van bewustzijn bij mensen in armoede over de collectieve en onrechtvaardige aard van armoede;
- Het omgaan met de complexiteit van de directe participatie van mensen in armoede in het publieke debat.

In de hoofdstukken 4, 5 en 6 gaan we telkens dieper in op een van deze elementen.

In hoofdstuk 4 staat de vraag centraal hoe sociaal werkers omgevingen kunnen creëren waarin de erkenning en gelijke waarde van mensen in armoede centraal staan terwijl men dergelijke omgevingen verbindt met de bredere socio-economische en politieke context. Uit onze analyse komt de vitale rol van praktijkwerkers in VwAhWN naar voor. Zij creëren vooraleerst omgevingen die dienen als veilige havens voor mensen en waarbinnen de praktijkwerkers relaties kunnen ontwikkelen met mensen in armoede, waardoor deze laatste het gevoel hebben te worden erkend als gelijkwaardige partner. Onze analyse duidt daarnaast op het belang om recognitie en empowerment van mensen in armoede niet enkel te situeren in het creëren van niches waarbinnen mensen in armoede worden aangesproken op hun sterktes om dingen te doen in de praktijk zelf, maar om dit ook continu en onlosmakelijk te verbinden met het transformatieve potentieel van dergelijke niches. Deze continue koppeling zorgt voor een belangrijke versterkende kracht die schuilt in het benadrukken van mensen in armoede als onvervangbare en actieve partners in het gevecht tegen armoede. Desalniettemin wordt ook duidelijk dat het immens complex is om de socio-economische en politieke onderdrukking van mensen in armoede via dergelijke niches aan te klagen, gezien participanten eigenlijk net een gelijkwaardig gevoel ervaren wanneer zij niet aangesproken worden op hun verschillen. Hoewel het essentieel blijft voor sociaal werkpraktijken om verschillen, machtsrelaties en uitsluitingsprocessen blijvend te erkennen en bediscussiëren, leren we hieruit dat deze verschillen altijd gekaderd moeten worden als een gespreksbasis om solidariteit en verontwaardiging te creëren voor het onrecht waar mensen in armoede elke dag mee geconfronteerd worden.

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt dieper ingegaan op de vraag of mensen in armoede wel altijd in een goede positie zitten om zich actief te engageren in de strijd tegen armoede. Gesteld wordt dat mensen uit gemarginaliseerde groepen vaak denkbeelden en handelingswijzen internaliseren die in hun eigen nadeel zijn of, sterker nog, zich zelfs neerleggen bij de positie die ze in de samenleving toebedeeld krijgen (Fraser, 1989, Freire, 1970, 1972; Bouverne-De Bie, 2003; Tew, 2006). In dit hoofdstuk wordt daarom ingegaan op de vraag wat de rol van praktijkwerkers is in het proberen om mensen in armoede – die onderwerp zijn van dergelijke processen van vervreemding en internalisatie – te engageren in de strijd voor sociale verandering en wat de complexiteit is van deze strategieën. Hierbij wordt verder gebouwd op de ideeën van Paulo Freire (1970, 1972) met betrekking tot het ontwikkelen van een pedagogische en participatieve praxis die een ‘cultuur van het zwijgen’ wenst te doorbreken door het kritisch bewustzijn van mensen aan te scherpen. Uit de analyse blijkt dat praktijkwerkers uit VwAhWN een belangrijke rol hebben in het stimuleren van dergelijk bewustzijn

door in dialoog met mensen in armoede hun eigen kennis inzake regels, rechten, instituties en de samenleving in te brengen; door armoede als een collectieve aangelegenheid te kaderen; en door ervaringen van mensen in armoede aan een structurele analyse te koppelen en zo verontwaardiging over het onrecht besloten in hun situaties te stimuleren. Vanuit de observatie van de complexiteit van dergelijke processen, worden de dialogische ideeën van Freire in verband gebracht met de machtspositie van praktijkwerkers. Hoewel duidelijk wordt dat werkers hun macht vaak intentioneel inzetten, blijkt dat dergelijke sturingsprocessen ook vaak 'gemaskeerd' of 'verborgen' worden, vanuit een geloof in het dialogisch en participatief aan de slag te gaan met mensen in armoede. Op basis van deze vaststellingen wordt betoogd dat een dialoog over machtsongelijkheden in sociaal werkpraktijken niet uit de weg moet worden gegaan. Er moet daarentegen net gezocht worden naar manieren om hierover gezamenlijk te reflecteren, waardoor mogelijkheden gecreëerd worden om niet enkel een kritisch bewustzijn te bewerkstelligen bij mensen in armoede, maar ook bij sociaal werkers en de ruimere samenleving.

In hoofdstuk 6 van deze dissertatie wordt ingegaan op de complexiteit van representatie-processen waarbij de ervaringen, perspectieven en claims van mensen in armoede in het publiek debat worden gebracht. Hierbij is het doel om meer inzicht te krijgen in de waarde en complexiteit van de directe participatie van mensen in armoede in dergelijke processen en in de rol van praktijkwerkers in het omgaan met deze complexiteit. Onze analyse toont dat er een onderscheid gemaakt kan worden tussen twee rollen: die van 'bewaker van collectieve en transformatieve elementen' – waarbij de directe participatie van mensen in armoede het leidend principe is, en die van 'strategische schaakspeler' – waarbij de ambitie van sociale verandering leidend is. Onze bevindingen tonen dat het zweren bij de directe participatie van mensen in armoede in representatie-processen het gevaar in zich draagt contraproductief te zijn voor sociale veranderingsobjectieven. Daarom wordt geconcludeerd dat er nood is aan reflexieve sociaal werkers die kritisch kunnen omgaan met participatieve principes, doch dat deze strategische overwegingen altijd samen met mensen in armoede moet gebeuren.

In hoofdstuk 7 trekken we een aantal algemene conclusies, gebaseerd op de voorgaande hoofdstukken.

Eerst en vooral kan dit onderzoek inspiratie bieden aan toekomstige onderzoekers die onderzoek doen naar de rol van sociaal werk in het armoedeprobleem. Hier is het belangrijk om niet het idee te scheppen dat

armoedeonderzoek een neutrale positie kan innemen, maar dat onderzoekers zich altijd moeten positioneren tegenover de vragen hoe men armoede conceptualiseert; welke onderzoeksvragen men stelt; hoe en in welke mate participanten mee het onderzoek vormgeven; en hoe we bevindingen in het onderzoek kunnen interpreteren en representeren (Roose *et al.*, 2015; Krumer-Nevo, 2017). In de veranderende socio-economische en politiek-maatschappelijke context, is onderzoek niet alleen te beschouwen als deel uitmakend van deze context, maar ook als een actieve vormgever van deze context. Hierbij kan onderzoek kiezen om de heersende probleemdefinities te bevestigen of net te bevragen (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). In dit onderzoek wordt duidelijk de keuze gemaakt voor onderzoek dat sociale rechtvaardigheid, sociale verandering en de participatie van mensen in armoede ondersteunt en promoot. Vanuit dergelijk engagement is het essentieel om transparant te zijn over de keuzes in het onderzoeksproces en over de gronden op basis waarvan deze keuzes gemaakt werden. Tegelijkertijd vraagt het ook om de onzekerheid en vloeiende en sporadische natuur van het onderzoeksproces te omarmen. Dit betekent dat geëngageerde keuzes in onderzoek gepaard moeten gaan met de openheid om keuzes te her-evalueren, instant keuzes te maken of processen zoals ze zich voordoen gewoon op hun beloop te laten.

Voor sociaal werkpraktijken die geëngageerd zijn in de strijd tegen armoede, is een belangrijke conclusie van dit onderzoek dat zelfs praktijken die zich ten volle engageren ten aanzien van het principe van gelijkwaardigheid van participatie, niet volledig ontsnappen aan machtsongelijkheden (Boone *et al.*, 2018b). Voor dergelijke kwesties bestaat geen eenduidig en gemakkelijk antwoord; ze zijn vooral een teken dat mensen in armoede in een fundamentele 'realiteit van ongelijkwaardigheid van participatie' zitten. Dit houdt in dat hun economische, culturele en politieke ondergeschikte positie niet enkel hun gelijkwaardige participatie in de samenleving en sociale instituties verhindert, maar ook hun participatie in sociaal werkpraktijken. Dit betekent dat sociaal werkpraktijken en sociaal werkers aan de slag moeten met deze ongelijkwaardigheid van participatie.

We betogen dan ook dat het 'heroïsche geloof' dat sociaal werkers de ongelijkwaardigheid van mensen in armoede en de daarmee gepaarde complexiteit in de praktijk kunnen oplossen, hen enkel ontgoocheld en gefrustreerd achterlaat, gezien ze hier onvermijdelijk in falen. Daarom is een alternatieve houding nodig, waarbij de ongelijkwaardigheid van mensen in armoede als een problematisch, doch inherent deel van de praktijk beschouwd wordt. Hierbij kunnen sociaal werkers hun rol zien als het 'leren om een

reflexieve schaakspeler' te worden in de complexiteit om de directe noden, bezorgdheden en aspiraties van mensen in armoede te honoreren terwijl gestreefd wordt naar sociale rechtvaardigheid en sociale verandering. Dit betekent dat sociaal werkers hun rol niet zien als experten of ultieme strategen, maar dat ze de onvoorspelbaarheid van hun ingezette strategieën aanvaarden en een gedeelde, participatieve en collaboratieve reflectie en dialoog over de ingezette en gewenste strategieën in de strijd tegen armoede mogelijk maken. In het creëren van culturele forums die plaats bieden aan een gezamenlijke reflectie op onrechtvaardigheden in het politieke, economische en culturele domein (Fraser, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008; Boone *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b), wordt tegelijk het potentieel geboren om dialoog over verschil, macht, ondergeschiktheid en onderdrukking in de praktijk zelf mogelijk te maken. Dit betekent dat praktijkwerkers de machtsongelijkheid die voortvloeit uit de onderschikte positie van mensen in armoede in de samenleving leren zien en erkennen, niet alleen als een maatschappelijk probleem, maar ook als een inherent deel van participatieve praktijken die sociale verandering nastreven. Eerder dan een heroïsche oplossing na te streven hiervoor, betekent dit dat sociaal werkers continu samen met mensen in armoede op zoek gaan naar wat participatie, op een bepaald moment, voor afzonderlijke individuen alsook voor de groepen in het licht van een bepaald objectief, kan betekenen.

Vanuit het besef dat de macht van mensen in armoede en van sociaal werkpraktijken om de samenleving te veranderen misschien gelimiteerd is, bouwen we op een metafoor van 'het blijvend gooien van de dobbelsteen'. Hier is de geëngageerde sociaal werker misschien wel diegene die de onvoorspelbaarheid van hoe de teerling valt – of hoe het schaakspel evolueert – aanvaardt, alsook elk resultaat van het gespeelde spel – of men nu wint of verliest – als een kans aangrijpt. Een kans om samen met mensen in armoede te reflecteren over de leermogelijkheden die vervat liggen in het spelproces en in het resultaat van het spel, zowel voor mensen in armoede als voor de strijd tegen armoede. Door niet enkel forums te creëren waarin de noden, bezorgdheden en claims inzake onrechtvaardigheid van mensen in armoede besproken en gecollectiviseerd worden, maar ook door deze continu te representeren in de samenleving, worden er mogelijkheden gecreëerd om de samenleving te bevragen op zijn sociaal rechtvaardigheidsgehalte (Boone *et al.*, 2018a). Dit betekent dat sociaal werkpraktijken, praktijkwerkers en mensen in armoede, onderlegd moeten worden in de 'kunst van het onmogelijke' (Biesta, 2014; De Bruyne & Bouchaute, 2014; Holemans, 2014; Debaene, 2018). Door de samenleving te confronteren met de afstand tussen de claim van mensen in armoede tot gelijkwaardigheid van participatie en de realiteit van hun

ongelijkwaardigheid van participatie, kunnen mogelijkheden gecreëerd worden om in te breken op de huidige samenleving. Hopelijk leiden dergelijke persistente inbreuken tot momenten waarop dialoog en reflectie over hoe deze realiteit van ongelijkwaardigheid kan omgezet worden naar een meer gelijkwaardige en rechtvaardige samenleving mogelijk worden. Tegelijkertijd is er het blijvende besef dat elk nieuw geformuleerd antwoord feilbaar is, nieuwe machtsongelijkheden oplevert en op haar beurt verstoord zal moeten worden in de naam van gelijkwaardigheid (Roose *et al.*, 2012)

References

- Baistow, K. (2000). Problems of powerlessness. Psychological explanations of social inequality and civil unrest in post-war America. *History of the Human Sciences*, 13(3), 95–116.
- Biesta, G. (2014). Learning in public spaces: Civic learning for the twenty-first century. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 1–11). London: Springer.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, poverty and anti-poverty strategies: Creating cultural forums. *British Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 16 March 2018. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcy006
- Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Claeys, A., & Vanhee, J. (2003). *Armoede en participatie*. Ghent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2015). *Sociale agogiek. Een sociaal-pedagogisch perspectief op sociaal werk*. Ghent: Academia Press.
- Bouverne-De Bie, M., Roose, R., Coussée, F., & Bradt, L. (2014). Learning democracy in social work. In G. Biesta, M. De Bie, & D. Wildemeersch (Eds.), *Civic learning, democratic citizenship and the public sphere* (pp. 43–54). London: Springer.

- Carey, M., & Foster, V. (2011). Introducing 'deviant' social work: Contextualising the limits of radical social work whilst understanding (fragmented) resistance within the social work labour process. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(3), 576–593.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Davis, A., & Wainwright, S. (2003). Combatting poverty and social exclusion: Implications for social work education. *Social Work Education*, 24(3), 259–273.
- Debaene, R. (2018). *Een democratie heeft nood aan sociaal werk. Vrijheid en gelijkheid staan centraal*. Retrieved from <https://sociaal.net/analyse-xl/een-democratie-heeft-nood-aan-sociaal-werk/>
- De Bruyne, P., & Van Bouchaute, B. (2014). De bestaande orde verstoren. Over de politieke opdracht van het middenveld. *Oikos*, 69(2), 19–31.
- De Corte, J., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work as a policy actor: Understanding social policy as an open-ended democratic practice. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published 20 April 2018. doi: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1462768
- Doom, R. (2003). Armoede: Een essay van de open deur. In M. Bouverne-De Bie, A. Claeys, A. De Cock, & J. Vanhee (Eds.), *Armoede en participatie* (pp. 245–272). Ghent: Academia Press.
- Downward, P., & Mearman, A. (2007). Retrodution as mixed-methods triangulation in economic research: Reorienting economics into social science. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31(1), 77–99.
- Driessens, K., & Geldof, D. (2009). Individu en/of structuur? Of wat wil het sociaal werk aanpakken? In J. Steyaert & W. Verzelen, *Canon van het sociaal Werk in Vlaanderen*. Retrieved from <https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/essays/Driessens%20Geldof%20-%20Individu%20en%20of%20structuur.pdf>
- Emerson, R. (2004). Working with key incidents. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 457–472). London: Sage.

- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry: QI*, 12(2), 219–245.
- Fook, J. (2002). *Social work: Critical theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Fraser, N. (1989). Talking about needs: Interpretative contests as political conflicts in welfare-state societies. *Ethics*, 99(2), 291–313.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2005). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69–88.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Garrett, P.M. (2010). Recognizing the limitations of the political theory of recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 1517–1533.
- Gray, M., & Webb, S.A. (2009). The return of the political in social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18(1), 111–115.
- Hermans, K. (2012). Structureel sociaal werk. Strijden tegen sociale ongelijkheid. *Alert*, 38(1), 8–14.
- Holemans, D. (2014). Van de politiek naar het politieke, van het haalbare naar het noodzakelijke. *Oikos*, 69(2), 4–18.
- International Federation of Social Workers (2014). *Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Jordan, B., & Jordan, C. (2000). *Social work and the third way: Tough love as social policy*. London: Sage Publications.

- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2005). Listening to 'life knowledge': A new research direction in poverty studies. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 99–106.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2009). From voice to knowledge: Participatory action research, inclusive debate and feminism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(3), 279–295.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2016). Poverty aware social work. A paradigm for social work practice with people in poverty. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46(6), 1793–1808.
- Krumer-Nevo, M. (2017). Poverty and the political: Wrestling the political out of and into social work theory, research and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*, 20(6), 811–822.
- Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lister, R. (2013). 'Power, not pity': Poverty and human rights. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), 109–123.
- Lorenz, W. (2014). *The need for a new social question*. Public lecture given at Ghent University on 20th March 2014.
- Lorenz, W. (2016). Rediscovering the social question. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(1), 4–17.
- Marston, G., & McDonald, C. (2012). Getting beyond heroic agency in conceptualizing social practitioners as policy actors in the twenty-first century. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(6), 1–17.
- Millar, M. (2008). Anti-oppressiveness: Critical comments on a discourse and its context. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 362–375.
- Mortelmans, D. (2007). *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*. Leuven: Acco.
- Mullaly, B. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Canada: Oxford University Press.
- Network against Poverty. (n.d.). *Gewoon mens mogen zijn!* Retrieved from <http://netwerktegenarmoede.be/documents/Visietekst-Vlaams-Netwerk.pdf>

- Neuman, W.L. (2010). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ragin, C.C., & Amoroso, L.M. (2011). *Constructing social research. The unity and diversity of method*. London: Sage.
- Roets, G., Roose, R., De Bie, M., Claes, L., & Van Hove, G. (2012). Pawns or pioneers? The logic of user participation in anti-poverty policy-making in public policy units in Belgium. *Social Policy and Administration*, 46, 807–822.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., & Bouverne-De Bie, M. (2012). Irony and social work: In search of the happy Sisyphus. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1592–1607.
- Roose, R., Roets, G., Schiettecat, T., Pannecoucke, B., Piessens, A., Van Gils, J., & Vandekinderen, C. (2016). Social work research as a practice of transparency. *European Journal of Social Work*, 19(6), 1021–1034.
- Schiettecat, T., Roets, G., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2014). *Paradigmatische verschuivingen en methodologische discussie in (kinder)armoedeonderzoek [VLAS-Studies 16]*. Antwerpen: Vlaams Armoedesteunpunt.
- Van Hove, G., & Claes, L. (2011). *Qualitative research and educational sciences: A reader about useful strategies and tools*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- Vranken, J. (2001). Unravelling the social strands of poverty: Differentiation, fragmentation, inequality, and exclusion. In H.T. Andersen & R. Van Kempen (Eds.), *Governing European cities. Social fragmentation, social exclusion, and urban governance* (pp. 71– 88). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Wilson, A., & Beresford, P. (2000). 'Anti-oppressive practice': Emancipation or appropriation? *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(5), 553–573.

Data storage fact sheets

Data Storage Fact Sheet (no.1)

Name/identifier study: **Mapping Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice**

Author: Katrien Boone

Date: 3 April 2018

1. Contact details

=====

1a. Main researcher

-

- name: Katrien Boone
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Gent
- e-mail: katrien.boone@ugent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

-

- name: Prof. dr. Rudi Roose
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Gent
- e-mail: rudi.roose@ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

=====

=

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Boone, K., Roets, G., & Roose, R. (2018). Social work, participation and poverty. *Journal of Social Work*. Advance Access published February 28 2018. doi: 10.1177/1468017318760789

.

Boone, K. (2018). *Social work, poverty and parity of participation: A search for social justice*. (Doctoral dissertation)

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: The sheet applies to all the data used in the publication.

3. Information about the files that have been stored

=====

=

3a. Raw data

-

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher?

☒ YES / ☐ NO

If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?

- ☒ researcher PC
- ☒ research group file server
- ☐ other (specify): ...

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

- ☒ main researcher
- ☒ responsible ZAP
- ☐ all members of the research group
- ☐ all members of UGent
- ☒ other (specify): The co-supervisor of the research project: Prof. dr. Griet Roets

3b. Other files

-

* Which other files have been stored?

- ☒ file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: These can be found in the methodology section of the article
- ☒ file(s) containing processed data. Specify: One NVivo 10 file that contains the processed data of the interviews
- ☒ file(s) containing analyses. Specify: See findings section in the article.
- ☒ files(s) containing information about informed consent: A blank copy of the informed consent is saved on my PC. Also, all signed informed consent were scanned and are on my pc, as well as on the research group file server.
- ☒ a file specifying legal and ethical provisions. Specify: The document that was submitted to the Ethical Commission is on my PC, on the research group file server, and I have a paper letter with the approval of the Ethical Commission.
- ☒ file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify:

One Microsoft Word document contains an overview of all the raw data that was collected.

- ☐ other files. Specify: ...

* On which platform are these other files stored?

- ☒ individual PC
- ☒ research group file server
- ☐ other: ...

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

- ☒ main researcher
- ☒ responsible ZAP
- ☐ all members of the research group
- ☐ all members of UGent
- ☐ other (specify): . The co-supervisor of the research project: Prof. dr. Griet Roets

4. Reproduction

=====

=

* Have the results been reproduced independently?: ☐ YES

/ ☒ NO

* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):

- name:
- address:
- affiliation:
- e-mail:

Data Storage Fact Sheet (no. 2)

Name/identifier study: **In depth research on how practitioners in Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice deal with the complexity of their work**

Author: Katrien Boone

Date: 3 April 2018

1. Contact details

=====

=

1a. Main researcher

-

- name: Katrien Boone

- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Gent

- e-mail: katrien.boone@ugent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

-

- name: Prof. dr. Rudi Roose

- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Gent

- e-mail: rudi.roose@ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

=====

=

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

Boone, K., Roets, G. & Roose, R. (submitted). Associations where People in Poverty Raise their Voice as a distinct space to combat poverty with people in poverty: from being on a par to participating on a par? *European Journal of Social Work*.

Boone, K., Roets, G. & Roose, R. (submitted). Raising critical consciousness in the struggle against poverty: breaking a culture of silence. *Critical Social Policy*.

Boone, K., Roets, G. & Roose, R. (submitted). Learning to Play Chess: How to make Sense of the Participatory Representativeness of the life knowledge of People in Poverty when Aiming for Societal Change. *Social Policy & Administration*.

Boone, K. (2018). *Social work, poverty and parity of participation: A search for social justice*. (Doctoral dissertation)

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: The sheet applies to all the data used in the publication.

3. Information about the files that have been stored

=====

=

3a. Raw data

-

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher?
[X] YES / [] NO
If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?

- [X] researcher PC
- [X] research group file server
- [] other (specify): ...

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

- [X] main researcher
- [X] responsible ZAP
- [] all members of the research group
- [] all members of UGent
- [X] other (specify): The co-supervisor of the research project: Prof. dr. Griet Roets

3b. Other files

-

* Which other files have been stored?

- [X] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: These can be found in the methodology section of the articles
- [X] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: One NVivo 10 file that contains the processed data of the interviews, and one logbook in which the participant observations were noted and in which an interpretation section was provided.
- [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: See findings section in the article.
- [X] files(s) containing information about informed consent: A blank copy of the informed consent is saved on my PC. Also, all signed informed consent were scanned and

are on my pc, as well as on the research group file server.

- ☒ a file specifying legal and ethical provisions.

Specify: The document that was submitted to the Ethical Commission is on my PC, on the research group file server, and I have a paper letter with the approval of the Ethical Commission.

- ☒ file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify: One Microsoft Word document contains an overview of all the raw data that was collected.

- ☐ other files. Specify: ...

* On which platform are these other files stored?

- ☒ individual PC
- ☒ research group file server
- ☐ other: ...

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

- ☒ main researcher
- ☒ responsible ZAP
- ☐ all members of the research group
- ☐ all members of UGent
- ☐ other (specify): The co-supervisor of the research

project Prof. dr. Griet Roets

4. Reproduction

=====

=

* Have the results been reproduced independently?: ☐ YES
/ ☒ NO

* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):

- name:
- address:
- affiliation:
- e-mail:

Overview of the five selected APRVs for the third study

→ APRV 1

The organisation originated in the first half of the 1990s, when some people gathered after the publication of a book on the relationship between their city and poverty. From the outset, it was built upon a mix of people with and without poverty experience. The organisation can be considered large, which is noticeable in the number of paid employees (five in 2015, including one person with poverty experience), in the diversity and number of activities, including big low-threshold activities such as a weekly open meeting group and the 'spelothek'²² and also including well established groups centred around specific substantive themes, and in the number of people they reach through all these activities. The organisation reaches a diversity of people, including people from diverse ethnic cultural backgrounds, which is especially due to their low-threshold activities such as the spelothek and the allotment of a pass to lower the cost of cultural activities. This does not necessarily imply that all those people find their way into the rest of the organisation, since a dozen people are present at almost every activity but other participants often selectively choose a specific activity in the organisation (mostly low-threshold activities). The organisation itself is aware of this and reflects on how to involve people in the more substantial parts of the organisation (for instance, one time out of four, the open meeting group is centred around a substantive theme). The organisation has explicitly chosen to work long term on two fixed substantive themes: 1) culture/sports and leisure time, and 2) education and nurturing, in which both low-threshold activities (for example, spelothek, singing afternoons) and substantial policy work (for example, parent groups, participating in external consultation groups) get a place. The organisation states that it is working around three big domains: bringing people together, collaborating with potential partners and working towards policy change. They also invest a lot in giving training sessions about the problem of poverty to other organisations or schools.

As stated, the organisation involves a mix of people with and without poverty experience. These are not named differently but are all regarded as 'allies' in the fight against poverty. In the organisation, this also implies that people with or without poverty experience take on voluntary work. Here, the final responsibility lies with paid employees, but (parts of) the activities are co-shaped or taken on

²² Spelothek is an approach in which a space is provided where toys can be borrowed for free while some play opportunities for the children and meeting opportunities for parents are also provided.

by volunteers (for instance, doing the intaker at the registration moments of the allotment of culture passes, shaping a festive occasion). Many of the activities occur in tandem, with a person with poverty experience and a paid employee preparing and attending a meeting or giving a training session together. The idea of allies is especially noticeable in the 'ally group', which is considered to be the most important internal participation channel. In this ally group, paid employees, people without poverty experience and people with poverty experience take part in discussing the general as well as substantive lines of the organisation. The board of directors is considered more a decision-making meeting, which also consists of a mix of people with and without poverty experience.

The organisation is located in a city of around 85,000 inhabitants, which has a high poverty rate. The organisation has gained clear recognition from the city council for the work that they do (low-threshold and substantive policy work) and has – often through collaboration with city partners or the general social welfare centre – achieved a lot, a clear example being that the APRV was the initiator of the allotment of a pass to enjoy lower-cost in cultural activities. Although there is an acknowledgment of each others' role between the organisation and local policy makers, there can nevertheless also be a lot of conflict, for instance about charitable logics in some of the policy-initiatives versus the plea of APRV for structural change, and the communication between city organisations and the APRV is not always up to par.

→ **APRV 2**

The organisation arose from the initiative of a priest who has been working for with people in precarious situations his whole life, and who formed the organisation after the Poverty Decree. He is presently still the chair of the organisation. A few years ago, the organisation moved to a new building together with an organisation involved in community building. Two to three paid employees work in the organisation, dependent on project grants. The organisation focuses on and reaches people in precarious living conditions, especially people without legal documents and citizenship. They organise a diversity of activities. On the level of low-threshold work, they organise welcoming events and basic activities (football, cooking) to provide a safe haven for participants. Twice a week, people can just come in and drink coffee, while a range of organisations are present to answer questions (organisation in community building, organisation for learning Dutch) and people can use the computer room. They articulate that this low-threshold work is the first step towards uniting people, listening to their experiences, questions and signals, and

possibly getting them enthusiastic for policy work and for action to change their and other people's situation. Their substantive group work for instance comprises a group of parents, who discuss the consequences for children living in families without legal documents and a group concerning the mental health and resilience of people without legal documents. Most activities are mainly shaped by paid employees, but also some steady volunteers support the various activities (cooking, food assistance).

The organisation has a rather activist focus, which is supported by the chairperson, and the participants seem also to be naturally connected to the goal of societal change, which might be the result of the clash between their ideas of finding stability in Belgium and the uncertain situation in which they find themselves, often lacking basic social rights and surviving in extreme living conditions. The organisation collaborates closely with a community-building organisation, which is co-located in the building. They organise many activities together (for instance, the family group is guided by a paid employee of both organisations) and they frequently have team meetings together. The organisation also has strong links with local collectives and autonomous organisations that gather around the problem of *sans-papiers* (people without legal documents), in which the APRV supports their activities and daily practice (for instance, giving them space to gather, collectively protesting). Since the organisation has not been located in the building or worked together with the community-building organisation for a long time, they are in a reflective process of trying to stimulate the participation and involvement of their visitors, where they have started a sort of overall internal communication and decision group whose aim is for participants to actively co-shape the organisation.

The organisation is located in the capital of Belgium – Brussels – a metropolis of about 1.2 million inhabitants. As such, there is a larger concentration of problems than in small cities and municipalities, and a high percentage of *sans-papiers*. The organisation explicitly focuses on this group, which differentiates it from most other APRVs. This is important to be aware of, since their problems concern not only poverty, but also the lack of clear rights and status, and a very uncertain outlook for their future. Since often the non-citizenship of *sans-papiers* is the first and foremost contributor to their poverty, it is also important to consider that while the relationship with local policy and local organisations of the APRV might be constructive, the issue of *sans-papiers* is a federal concern regarding which local cities have limited impact, which also implies that many of the actions of this particular APRV are targeted at the federal level.

→ APRV 3

The organisation can be considered rather small, which is noticeable in the number of paid employees (a graduated expert by experience takes on one third of a full time equivalent and a person without poverty-experience takes on two third of a full time equivalent) and in the people reached (thirty people, of whom fifteen very frequently). It comprises mostly – not exclusively – women, which is the effect of their genesis, as they evolved from the mother group of a local service organisation. Many of the participants specifically deal with a combination of health issues and a dependency of a an income replacement.²³ The organisation has recently been supported by one volunteer, but does not really have a tradition of working with volunteers who take on fixed tasks.

The organisation states that it is searching for a combination of low-threshold work, in which meeting one another is central, with substantial policy work, in which thinking and acting together towards societal change is central. In the organisation it was decided in 2015 to come together four times a month with the larger group, once purely to meet one another and three times with a thematical input, and then once a month with a smaller group to do some very focused thinking about a substantive policy theme. In the period that the researcher observed the organisation, this was focused on income replacements. The organisation also frequently gives training sessions for schools and organisations concerning poverty, which is taken on in tandem by the worker with poverty experience and the worker without, by a practitioner together with participants, or by the expert-by-experience. In daily practice, they articulate that 'togetherness' is central, thinking and acting together with participants. The paid employees are responsible for and instigators of all activities, in which participants provide much support to the workers in practical tasks, though they do not really have a structurally fixed voluntary role. The organisation has an internal 'thinking and supporting group', consisting of the chairperson, the paid employees and three participants (with some experience in the organisation), in which the substantial lines of the organisation are discussed. This group can be considered a preparation for the Board of Directors, in which participants with poverty experience also take part.

The organisaiton is active in a small city of approximately 27,000 inhabitants. While the organisation takes part in some exchange groups in the city, it does not really experience being regarded as a structural partner and expert by policy

²³ In my period of observation, the chairperson changed, as well as the paid employee without poverty experience. The person with poverty experience was out for a long period.

makers and by some important social services in the policy around poverty, and considers its influence to be very limited. If there is recognition of the APRV in the city, it is stated to be mostly in the gathering of people in an approachable way. Nevertheless, the history of the organisation shows that the APRV has made some achievements, for instance in their advocacy for a food bank in the city. There is close contact with a meeting and activity centre and with a 'walk-in centre' of the centre for general welfare. Many of the APRV participants also attend these activities.

→ **APRV 4**

The organisation is small in terms of paid employees (1 employee, who works 80 per cent). Nevertheless the organisation organises or engages in a large number of activities, which is made possible by the active engagement of the chairperson and the large volunteer group. Before, this group consisted mainly of people without poverty experience but in recent years, many of the participants with poverty experience have also become volunteers. The organisation reaches around fifty families, or around 65 people in poverty, mostly between the ages of thirty to 75, with women predominating. Half of this group regularly attend a diversity of activities. The organisation is at present at its maximum capacity since the space in its house is limited, but this might expand since local policy indicates potential investment in renovation works.

It is very clear in the organisation that there is a distinction between who is responsible for or the initiator of, on the one hand, the base work and, on the other, the policy work. The low-threshold base work is supported by volunteers (cooking nights; computer, language and sewing-lessons; activities in holiday periods). These activities grow out of needs or signals of participants. Although the paid employee and chairperson have an overview of those activities, they do not have a really active role in shaping them in daily practice. On the other hand, the chairperson and/or paid employee closely determine the policy work, for instance the consultation groups in the municipality (the steering group on poverty), shaping activities around the international day against poverty, exchanging with other APRVs in the region, and taking part in substantial meetings at the Network against Poverty. Here, participants often take part in those activities, but do not initiate them. In contrast to many APRVs, there is not really separated work on a distinct substantial policy theme in the organisation, although participants take part in a monthly gathering, 'the circle', which is an internal participation channel in which daily practice and substance are discussed. Every participant who has been in the organisation for at least a year

can (and does) take part. Once a month an external organisation also gives a sort of training session about a subject (for instance, how to use the train). There is an annual day called 'worries day' in which all participants of the organisation can express their concerns, needs and claims. From those activities, some general themes have come to the surface, which are often addressed when engaging in activities towards policy or societal change: health and the 'third-party payment provision'²⁴, participation of people in poverty and debts of people. Until 2015, the board of directors consisted of a combination of this organisation with another which focuses on material and crisis aid, but owing to some differences of opinion the latter became a separate organisation. The organisation is still exploring how to organise the board of directors, but it has already created the opportunity to restart the voluntary meeting, in which people with and without poverty experience are brought together.

The organisation is situated in a large municipality of 35,000 inhabitants. It has achieved general recognition of its important role and expertise in the field of poverty and the participation of people in poverty, and appears to be considered a worthy partner by the city council and social services.

→ APRV 5

The organisation started more than twenty years ago, and grew out of a couple of people who themselves lived in difficult and deprived circumstances and who extracted themselves from a recurring meeting arrangement in the city and started their own organisation. The reasoning behind this move was that the meeting arrangement gathered many people with different ethnic backgrounds, amongst whom some of the Dutch-speaking people no longer found their niche. Today, the organisation is mainly to be seen as an autonomous organisation of people in poverty, in which the chairperson and coördinator have lived in precarious situations themselves and in which the paid employees (at the start of the research there were two, now only one) have a supporting but not so much a decisive role.

Many activities are undertaken by the organisation, such as regular weekly meetings, computer classes and festive events. A substantial gathering also takes place every month (previously twice a month). One of the main focus points

²⁴ Is a system in which medical health care costs are directly arranged through the social security system, so the person only has to pay his own part and not pay the whole lot and then wait until the social security system pays it back. This is already often taken on in doctor's expenses, but the APRV also makes a strong plea to do this for the reimbursement of drugs.

of the organisation on the substantive level is sensitising the wider society about the problem of poverty, in which one of their biggest achievements has been the creation of a sensitising game which functions as an educational tool. They also try to develop projects for sensitising schools about poverty or sensitising society at large about the specificity of elderly people living in poverty. The participants in the organisation vary depending on the specific activities. Every Saturday there is the opportunity for a diversity of people gather in a monastery and enjoy a cheap meal (young-old, male-female, some very precarious while others come mostly because they need company, a few people from different ethnic backgrounds). At the weekly *crea* gatherings²⁵, it is mostly elderly ladies that participate. Generally, the organisation reaches mostly elderly people (most are the age of fifty or above) and there is a core group of people who take part in most activities. The large group of people who participate in low-threshold activities mostly state that they come for the warmth and to meet people, with little or no reference being made to the substantial policy groupwork. As we have emphasised, the organisation describes itself most of all as an autonomous body and it is no surprise that people in poverty take part in the board of directors and the coordinator and chairperson (both with poverty experience) are the leading figures in the organisation. The chairperson is mostly active in organising the meeting and *crea* activities, whereas the (unpaid) coordinator is vital for networking and substantial work. Paid employees are said to be supportive of the organisation and to shape substantial group work, but do not make the main decisions (for instance, they do not get the final say on the theme or subject of the group work). The organisation can also build upon some steady volunteers, where some engage in meeting activities (for example cooking) and others take on the role of representing their organisation in formal national and international meetings. Interns and people who come in through alternative work trajectories are also stated to contribute to shaping the organisation.

The organisation is active in a city of around 75,000 inhabitants. Collaboration with external local actors is at the core of the organisation: it takes part in a large meeting on (child) poverty, it is the initiator of a core group concerning poverty, and there is also much informal exchange with local policy makers. Much emphasis in the city is put on a 'together story' with local policy making, and there are also many informal networks between organisations and services in the city where the one helps the other.

²⁵ Activity with a creative input, for instance an activity in which people can knit or play a type of bingo.

Overview of the observations in the third study

APRV 1:

EXPLORATION PHASE	
Teamday of practitioners	18/8/2015
Roundtable in the city surround education and nurturing	22/9/2015
Internal participation channel	22/9/2015
Regional workgroup surrounding cultural participation	6/10/2015
Weekly toy lending activity	14/10/2015
Activity - International Day Against Poverty	17/10/2015
Substantive permanence: digital gap	23/10/2015
Substantive permanence: social grocery	1/11/2015
Internal gathering of group who does reception-activities	14/12/2015
FOCUS PHASE	
Internal participation channel	18/2/2016
Training session for external actors surrounding poverty	3/3/2016
Substantive theme-group: culture	12/4/2016
Internal participation channel	14/4/2016
Substantive permanence: social grocery	15/4/2016
Group who works around culture visits the city building in which a lot of services gather	17/5/2016

Meeting with policy makers surrounding social grocery	18/5/2016
Substantive theme_group: culture	16/6/2016
Activity for the International Day against Poverty	15/10/2016
Internal training session for all volunteers	19/11/2016

* N= 19 - 9 exploration phase, 10 focus phase

APRV 2

EXPLORATION PHASE	
Low threshold meeting with group	15/10/2015
Substantive themegroup: Mental health	6/11/2015
Substantive themegroup: Families	7/12/2015
Low threshold meeting with group	21/12/2015
FOCUS PHASE	
Substantive themegroup: Families	26/4/2016
Substantive themegroup: Families	10/5/2016
Substantive themegroup: Families	7/6/2016
Internal participation Channel	
Substantive themegroup: Families	25/10/2016
Group-preparation meeting with rights commissioner	8/11/2016
Meeting with Children rights-commissioner	9/11/2016

March through the streets - group Families	17/5/2017
--	-----------

* N= 12 - 4 exploration phase, 8 focus phase

APRV3

EXPLORATION PHASE	
Substantive Theme-group	1/10/2015
Group-gathering around Celebration 10 year existence	8/10/2015
Celebration 10 year existence	16/10/2015
Substantive theme-group	19/10/2015
Internal participation channel	27/10/2015
Substantive theme-group	10/11/2015
Training session towards external school	16/12/2015
FOCUS PHASE	
Substantive theme-group	23/2/2016
Substantive theme-group	12/4/2016
Meeting with practitioner Network against Poverty concerning the substantive work	13/4/2015
Substantive theme-group	3/5/2016
Internal participation channel	17/5/2016
Substantive theme-group	14/6/2016

Low threshold meeting with group	30/6/2016
Low threshold meeting with group	27/10/2016

* N= 15 - 7 exploration phase, 8 focus phase

APRV 4

EXPLORATION PHASE	
Low threshold hobbyclub	5/10/2015
Internal participation channel	6/10/2015
Steering group poverty-policy	27/10/2015
Low threshold meeting: French lesson	19/11/2015
Conversation with important volunteer	19/11/2015
FOCUS PHASE	
Gathering of local APRV	9/3/2016
Annual –day where participants can express their concerns	28/4/2016
Internal participation channel	4/5/2016
Internal participation channel	2/6/2016
Preparation of the steering group poverty policy (practitioner of APRV is one of the members)	9/6/2016
Steering group poverty-policy	28/6/2016
Activity for International Day against Poverty	17/10/2016

* N = 12, 5 exploration phase, 7 focus phase

APRV 5

EXPLORATION PHASE	
Team-meeting surrounding project sensitizing schools about child poverty.	23/11/2015
Training session for external actor: sensitizing game	23/11/2015
Platform Child-poverty	24/11/2015
Internal computer-course	24/11/2015
Coregroup Poverty	25/11/2015
Second part of team-meeting surrounding project sensitizing schools about child poverty.	26/11/2015
Help cook with volunteers for cook-activity	27/11/2015
Meeting of coordinator with center for education-guidance	27/11/2015
Meeting of coordinator with a participant of a Housing First project	27/11/2015
Meeting/cooking on Saturday	28/11/2015
FOCUS PHASE	
Substantive theme-group: sensitizing schools – visiting an external organisation	2/2/2016
Substantive theme-group: elderly	1/3/2016
Substantive theme-group: elderly	5/4/2016
Substantive theme-group: game – children	12/5/2016
Forum Poverty	13/5/2016

Group-preparation around the international day against Poverty	13/5/2016
Substantive theme-group 'everybody happy'	2/6/2016
Substantive theme-group	5/7/2016
Participant in tandem with practitioner of the Network against Poverty in the Flemish parliament surrounding holiday-participation	25/10/2016
Meeting of people with poverty-experience of whole Flanders surrounding holiday-participation	29/11/2016
National Forum Poverty	1/12/2016

* N= 22: 11 exploration phase, 11 focus phase