Abstract title: Social Innovation and empowerment in Public Elder Care. The role of Action Research

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Preferred session: Inclusion and exclusion

Equipment required: Power Point

Keywords:
Action research, empowerment, care

Abstract:
This paper is about social innovation and empowerment in care work at public nursing homes and the role of action research. It is based on work in the “Center for Demokratisk Samfundsudvikling og Aktionsforskning” at Roskilde University and the transnational research network KATARSIS, which works with social innovation.

The paper provides an introduction to some of the core features, objectives and methodologies of action research/critical utopian action research (CUAR), which is a distinct type of knowledge creation linked appropriate to social innovation and empowerment.

The empirical parts of the paper comes from an action research project about quality in elder care initiated by action researchers and the trade union for public servants (FOA) The project “Quality in Elder Care” (QEC) was initiated in 2008 and carried out in 2009/10.by the trade union FOA and university employed action researchers (Roskilde University and DTU). The background was an increasingly negative public discourse in the public media about neglect in elder care. Scandals reported in the media included cases in which the employees were accused of incompetence and inhumane care practices . The case shows and discusses (1) how the employees and residents at a public
nursing home developed and carried out initiatives to change a negative spiral of increasing inhumanity in elder care; (2) how critical utopian action research can contribute to the development of practical and collective utopias about human social relations and to implement a human needs orientated agenda for both residents and employees as an alternative to the dominant neo-bureaucratic and (quasi) market oriented agenda of New Public Management regime.