



## **Building knowledge with everyone?**

### **Participatory research involving people in poverty**

Symposium organised by the CNRS, ATD Fourth-World, and the Cnam<sup>1</sup>  
March 1<sup>st</sup> 2017

If participatory research is developing in many subjects, rarely does it actually allow for the participation of non-scientists throughout the research process. They generally do not include those that are furthest from public discourse. The merging of knowledge with people living in poverty therefore constitutes a double challenge as well as an epistemological ambition.

The first scientific challenge consists in thinking of research differently, starting from the principle that the forms of knowledge and experience are multiple. The aim is to merge knowledge throughout the research process, from the elaboration of research questions to the analysis and circulation of results, including the choice of study objects, hypotheses, and methodology. If the democratic, emancipatory dimension of such an approach seems obvious, its epistemological aspect should be consolidated. How does the co-production of research between researchers, professionals, activists and laypeople bring about new knowledge? What requirements does it add to the practise of research?

The second scientific challenge, following feminist or post-colonial epistemology which underlined the importance of contextualised knowledge, is the recognition of the knowledge of people living in poverty. The research undertaken over two decades based on merging of knowledge shows that science is improved when it makes space for the “contextualised knowledge of the poor”. This knowledge arises from the experience of daily survival, of shame and silence, but also of mutual aid. It is constructed within a collective approach. If the merging of knowledge concerns all of society, including people living in poverty requires particular care, brings knowledge otherwise inaccessible to researchers, and interrogates the unequal social relationships in the production and validation of knowledge.

Because the knowledge of people living in poverty is usually disregarded, because its recognition interrogates the connections between knowledge production and unequal social relationships, this research raises ethical, scientific, and practical questions for researchers as well as for professionals, activists, and people living in poverty themselves.

Around these crucial challenges for science and democracy, this symposium represents an opportunity to initiate a new type of collaborative space, within which each could contribute to research and help advance our thinking about the ethical, methodological, and epistemological questions raised by this type of research. It also aims to advance their institutional recognition and their political and social importance. Such an approach involves research, education, and public policy.

<sup>1</sup> With a group of professionals and scientists who took part to "*Séminaire sur l'épistémologie des démarches participatives et en croisement des savoirs avec des personnes en situation de pauvreté*" (2015-2016), organised by ATD Quart Monde, Cnam and ODENORE : Hugues Bazin, Laboratoire d'innovation sociale par la recherche-action ; Marion Carrel, Groupement d'intérêt scientifique démocratie et participation ; Cyril Fiorini, doctorant Laboratoire HT2S (Cnam) ; Aude Lapprand, Sciences Citoyennes ; Philippe Warin, PACTE/Observatoire ODENORE-Université Grenoble-Alpes. More information available in « Appel pour le développement des recherches participatives en croisement des savoirs, issu de ce séminaire » : <http://recherche-action.fr/croisonslessavoirs/>