

# Participatory Approach in the Work of a Social Worker with Homeless People

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## Abstract:

The research study is focused on the participatory approach in the work of a social worker with homeless people. The participatory approach emphasizes the involvement of service users in decision-making processes that directly affect them within the service, organization or within society as a whole. This approach is based on the concepts of recovery and empowerment and on the partnership concept of cooperation between the social worker and the service user. The research part deals with the application of this approach in practice, specifically in an organization that works with homeless people.

## Introduction

Homelessness has existed since the beginning of human society - as the first example of this negative social phenomenon, we can mention ex-

clusion from the community, when a particular person has lost his or her relationship with his or her group or tribe. The concept of homelessness etymologically comes from the word home, the

meaning of which is not limited to the roof over your head, but also includes social background or family and the wider community, love and acceptance, security and privacy “To be homeless, to have nowhere to go, to have no one to confide in with one's worries, suffering, pain, protest, frustration, means loneliness, the burden of isolation, the pain of exclusion, leading to despair and self-destruction“ (Hradečtí, 1996, p. 36).

The definition of homelessness as the absence of a home is too simplistic and obscures the fact that it is far from just a loss of housing but a much deeper and more complex problem, mostly involving more negative phenomena such as: family breakdown; job loss; indebtedness; various psychological and social pathologies. the most visible of which are various types of addictions and crime (Průdková a Novotný, 2008, p. 11-12). It is a deep life crisis, the result of total failure in an individual's life.

The aim of the empirical research study is to find the answer to the main research question –

*How do the social workers of a charity in the Prešov Region perceive the functioning of the participatory method in their daily practice?*

At the beginning we will explain the basic theoretical background - concepts that are significantly related to the topic. Subsequently, we describe the methodology used in the research. We outline research strategy, data collection techniques and other important aspects of research. We also set a goal and partial research questions. The last part is devoted to the analysis and subsequent interpretation of the obtained data. In the end, we answer the main research question and consider possible recommendations for practice.

## Theoretical Basis

The issue of participatory approach in social work is a new phenomenon that is used in practice. The concept of participation has different contents in different contexts. For the purposes of this study, the term participation can be defined as the participation of users of social services in the planning, coordination and evaluation of services, leading to the empowerment of these users and also to improving the quality and efficiency of services provided. (Beresford a Croft, 1993). In a narrower, individual sense, this term can be understood as a partnership approach of a social worker to the client (Davies, 2002, p. 90).

More generally and simply, participation means the degree of participation of individuals and groups in decisions that directly affect them (Davies, 2000, p. 355). The author of Schuring (2015) generally distinguishes between horizontal and vertical participation.

Vertical or public participation is the participation of citizens in political decision-making processes, from the right to vote and the ability of citizens to express themselves on political events, through the requirement of expertise in the preparation of specific projects and delegations, for example, social services into the hands of non-profit organizations, to the cooperation of all stakeholders in the preparation of a specific law (eg the law on subsidies for housing development and on social housing) and state support for self-help civic projects (eg the national project *Support for Partnership and Dialogue in the Field of Participatory Public Policy Making*).

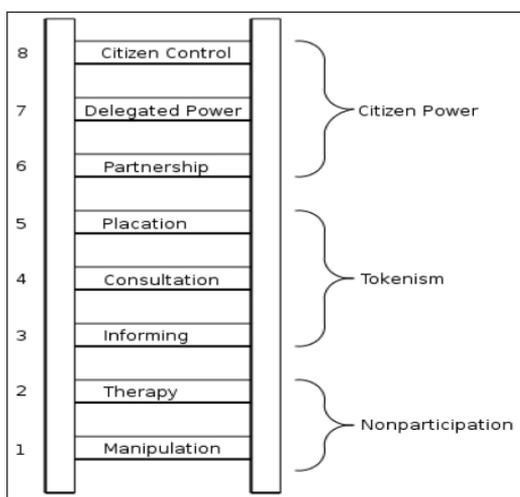
Horizontal participation is the involvement of disadvantaged groups of citizens in the life of society, the equal rights of their voice in society and the support of their own activities, leading to social inclusion and social cohesion. Social work deals with this type of participation in particular. „Participation is sustainable only if we involve all groups of people, not just people like us or with whom we get along well“ (Schuringa, 2015).

„Promoting participation at the lowest levels (involvement in the life of the local community or local organizations promoting their interests), horizontal participation is, according to previous experience, a suitable tool for opening imaginary doors to vertical participation, influencing the system at higher levels - municipal, regional, national or European“ (Adams, 2008, p. 41). The very participation of users of social services is based on two main approaches (Bandit, 2015). The first is the consumerist approach, it points to the user, i.e. the client who becomes a customer and has a choice. His satisfaction is a measure of service quality. Involving users in improving service quality is a logical part of this approach (Mačkinová, 2010). Another approach is democratic and rooted in the idea of community planning. It therefore has a deeper human rights dimension, it is based on the principles of equality and power sharing.

The most well-known division of participation levels, the so-called participation ladder,

comes from Arnstein (1969). The ladder consists of 8 rungs, from the lowest to the highest participation rate (Figure 1). The author places the first 2 levels, manipulation and therapy, in the category of non-participation. From the point of view of delegating power, this would be powerlessness. The other 3, information, consultation and involvement, are referred to as tokenism, i.e symbolic power. Only the last three rungs, „Partnership, delegated power and civil control, according to the author, they have an empowering potential, it therefore refers to them as civic influence or civil power“ (Gojová, 2016, p. 20).

**Figure No. 1** Participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969)



The issue of participatory approach in social work is relatively new, and therefore the long-term intention of social work is to apply this approach more often in the practical field using individual methods with different gages of social work not only with homeless people. The author Bandit (2015, p. 82) writes that „It is necessary to create methodologies and instructions for effective involvement of users in various services. User participation and involvement should become an integral part of good practice in social work. Such a need is also related to the clear need to develop reflective and anti-oppressive social work and to enshrine the principles of cooperation, participation and empowerment in ethical codes of social work.“

## Methodology – Research Design

To answer the main research question: *How do the social workers of a charity in the Prešov Region view the functioning of the participatory method in their daily practice?* In the study, we used a qualitative method that allowed us inductive insight into the issue. The research was carried out using the technique of semi-structured interview and the method of data interpretation thematic analysis. According to Hendl (2016), this is a middle ground, which is characterized by a defined purpose, a certain outline, but also the flexibility of the whole process of obtaining information. The unit of research was to find out how charitable organizations practicing a participatory approach in social work with homeless people work. The survey unit was selected social workers of a charity in the Prešov Region. The intentional selection method was used to select the conversation partners. The selection criterion was experience with a participatory approach. Data were obtained through interviews, represented by 4 social workers - field social workers. The analysis of the obtained data was performed using thematic analysis, which is part of the process of identification and organization of topics in qualitative data (Braun a Clarke, 2012).

To answer the main research question, partial research questions were used, which were based on the research concept. The partial research questions were therefore determined as follows:

1. *What are the challenges of a participatory approach from the point of view of the organization's social workers?*
2. *What is the benefit of a participatory approach from the point of view of social workers?*

This research study maintained the ethical principles of the research and that all participants were informed about the purpose of the interview and to maintain the anonymity and anonymity of the organization that wanted it.

## Results

First, we focused on the individual questions of the interview, which serve as support points for us in the verification - thematic analysis. During the thematic analysis of the interviews, we found 24 topics that are closely interconnected. We tried to sort them so that they logically follow

each other, and we divided them into three categories. The structure of the research results is therefore the following Figure 2.

**Figure 2** Category of topics

<b>Social Workers</b>
<b>Social center</b>
<b>Challenges and obstacles obstacles</b>
Beginning
Qualifications
Work
Sense
Basic support
Social work
Space to engage
Tailor-made services
Rules and prohibitions
Passivity
More and more
Aggression – conflicts
Team support

We called the first category of topics **social workers**. This is the main pillar of the participatory approach in the research study, and it is essential that it touches on the very beginnings of the organization.

**Beginning** – three social workers stated that it all started as part of a university study in the field of Social Work. The respondent was approached by acquaintances a few years ago during the holidays to volunteer at the time of Advent for the homeless. „They came up with the idea of selling Christmas punch, honeysuckle at Christmas markets and so on.“ The respondent perceived the offer as an opportunity to gain practice and experience something new. Together with other people, he became involved in volunteer work.

**Qualifications:** The interviews showed that all social workers in the organization have a university degree in Social Work and only one social worker has not completed II. degree of higher education. Respondent No. 1 was originally employed in the organization through the Labor Office of Social Affairs and the Family: „And then

*I was actually paid out of the employment office first, so they applied for my position, but it was only for some two years or for how long. The management also wanted me to complete a master's degree in social work.*“ Respondent No. 2 has experience with the Office of Labor and Social Affairs and the Family. This respondent was contacted about a year ago, with the offer of a social worker in an organization dedicated to the homeless where they meet the requirements for inclusion, and can hire me later. „Actually, at the beginning, the management offered me - they told me that then they would choose 2 of us, to whom they would offer cooperation. And with the proviso that if someone wants to work as a social worker somewhere in another organization, they will get a recommendation.“ Other respondents worked as social workers or field social workers with a professional classification in the field of Social Work.

**Work:** Respondent No. 3 told us about the very beginnings of social work in the organization: „Then actually another project after that was something like ... field work and community work“. It started with field social work carried out by field social workers with the support of others from the team. Initially, it was a few hours a week: „There were about four of us, somehow we always went in pairs for two hours in the field in a week.“ This was joined by the original social center, which was only open for one afternoon a week: „On Tuesday, the center was just open there, so you could not only wash your clothes and stuff, but most importantly probably call and just do the things you don't do outside for work and stuff.“ Respondent No. 2, after getting acquainted with the work and went through training, was also offered work in pairs in the field. „After training, I went to the field with a colleague and it was a challenge to help people on the homeless street as a field worker. That attracted me.“ Later, the current social center was opened and since then there is almost no time left for field social work: „At first we went more into the field, now as the social center was created, it moved to the social center and the terrain decreased a bit. Which is probably a shame, but I hope it gets back to the old norms until it's a little better organized here.“ Accompaniments are currently the most used accompaniment of field work, as commented by respondent No. 4: „Pe-

ople (...) go to the labor office as an escort and the like, but (...) they are less looking for new necessary places, new people, there is simply no time for that.“ Respondent No. 1 states: „Accompanying is a toy, but establish communication so that it is something (...),I was scared at first, but a colleague always helped me.“ This aspect of communication was mentioned by all respondents in the interview.

**Sense:** All the field social workers talked about them enjoying their work and fulfilling them. As respondent No. 3 says: „As far as housing is concerned, I can't secure my own housing, I haven't moved a step further at all, but I only have a job ... I got a job that I enjoy.“ Respondent No. 2 spoke about the fact that, in addition to working in a social center, he now deals with primary prevention in schools within the framework of socio-pathological phenomena - addiction. „I want to help the children, too. I want the children not to be addicted.“ Another respondent is a representative of an organization in the field of social housing, in cooperation with the city council, i.e. the social field. One of the respondents comments: „So I try to do things that I enjoy and that make sense. And especially what I studied here.“ We called the second category of topics the **social center**. We have included in this category both the provision of basic services to homeless people and activities beyond the scope of regular services and ways of involving clients in the running of the organization.

**Basic support:** Clients are provided with basic support: food, hygiene, clothing, the opportunity to wash things, make phone calls, keep things. These services were described by respondent No. 2: „So that they can take a bath, so that they can wash the laundry, so that they don't have to wash it anywhere in their hands“, and „when they need the clothes, they can choose it here, otherwise we always have some supplies here for the most necessary cases.“ He also explains that food is served and that clients have hot food almost every day of the week: „Through the project, hot food is provided for homeless people. Meals are provided only on request, this means that homeless people get free hot concentrated soup (bread / pastries, hot soft drink), so we are de facto providing food aid to people.“ And respondent No. 4 speaks, another service is the possibility to call: „If someone needs to call the au-

thorities, so we'll lend them a business phone,“ and adds that lockers are also available to act as a locker for things: „So they can go to those lockers (...) so they can take those things,“ and “they just didn't have to take everything with them.“

**Social work:** As we have already mentioned, an important job of social workers in a social center is social work. Respondent No. 1 lists the basic tasks: „We are actually looking for accommodation, we arrange ID cards, birth certificates“ and is supplemented by respondent No. 2: „We mediate those contacts with services that are professional, need help, need advice on how to proceed when they are in debt, in domestic violence and so on (...).“ Respondent No. 3 also talks about accompaniments: „We actually do escorts ... I don't know ... to the employment offices, if the person has to go outside the Prešov Region, then we are able to go with him outside the region and accompany him there, if he has problems with that“, and explains the importance of accompaniments: „This also applies to escorts to the doctor, because homeless clients often have a problem with this, if you report that they are actually homeless, they do not treat them very nicely. So it's probably better if they have someone there who ..., who they can lean on. And the fact is that it is enough to say that I am a field worker, and the client will say that she wants me to be there, and the clients are viewed differently.“ And he adds: „It really happened to me many times that they were suddenly more accommodating to the client (...). That just a few words are really enough, (...) and it works.“ Respondent No. 4 currently described how he, accompanied by the client, managed to arrange material need benefits: „So I've been struggling with this for a year, and now we've solved it all ...“

**Space to engage:** All activities of the social center are planned together with the clients, who either design them themselves, or at least participate in their form, if they want. Respondent No. 2 describes it as follows: „If anyone wanted, could, for example, give an example, bedding or something, he would come to us, he would say that he would like to take courses here, for example, if there is interest, then definitely yes, clients actually try, even if it is possible, to get money (...), the client would definitely not do it for free (...), now here we have designed sewing courses“, and sums it up in words: „Actually, al-

most anything is *de facto* possible here. We connect social rehabilitation and the development of work skills with the educational process.“ Respondent No. 1 states basically the same thing: „No matter what request they come up with, there is room (...), it's up to them, we will provide all the material and other necessary things“, and adds: „Something goes slower, like the sewing workshop.“

**Tailor-made services:** Even the space of the community center is co-created by the clients according to their ideas, as stated by respondent no. 1: „Here, as the rooms are, the clients have actually adjusted them as much as they like them, as they need them, as it suits them“ and is supplemented by respondent No. 3: „Originally we didn't want to have beds here, but because they actually came and really wanted to, they're just here (...) and they can just rest here all day.“ According to respondent No. 2, clients participate in decision-making processes, including the operation of the community center: „There are often meetings here now where they actually express their opinion on what they would like to change or what they are happy with, and I think those suggestions can usually be fulfilled, or that they will simply be accommodated, because ... Well, that's what it's about, well.“ Joint community meetings are held about once a month, always as needed, whether by employees or clients: „They can also take advantage of the fact that they can tell for themselves,“ says respondent No. 4, adding: „Now it's about once every fortnight.“ Respondent No. 3 comments similarly: „Just when it's needed and it's graduating.“ Respondent No. 2 describes the course of meetings: „We're talking to them about how they're here, what they'd like differently. If we have any new information we want to tell them, then we'll tell them, too.“ Respondent No. 1 also described the course of the meetings: „Mostly like clients talking, then someone who wants to say something is called, then of course they shout over each other, but that can be regulated.“ Respondent No. 2 also explains that it is appropriate to evaluate clients for active participation: „You can invite these people to a meeting and then just give them something for it, (...) because otherwise they might go to work, instead of participating in something here ... Maybe from the beginning it is not as important for them, (...) and even maybe to offer them so-

mething for it (...) that strikes me as a good motivation.“ He further emphasizes the importance of mutual communication: „I think that's also very important, like getting constant feedback from those people all the time, like what they would like differently, or when ... just talking about it, when it doesn't work, when something doesn't work, then it's like having the discussion, having the dialogue.“ He adds: „It's mutually beneficial.“

**Rules and prohibitions:** Another thing in which the clients of the social center actively participate is, according to respondent No. 1, the creation of rules: „We also created rules together so that ... they too can participate.“ The respondent further states that the social center has set only 3 basic rules from the beginning: „Without drugs, without alcohol and not aggression“ and the rest is completed together with clients: „These are like the basics, then we just try to create those rules at various regular meetings with those clients.“ Respondent No. 2 specifies that the condition for entering the community center is not sobriety, but alcohol or drugs may not be used directly in the center: „Actually, the clients here ... they can come here in a slightly drunk state, they can't be aggressive, and actually the same with drugs. So they can't drink here before us, and they can't use the drugs here, yeah.“ And he emphasizes: „If there is some kind of aggression, some kind of violence, then the client is expelled, and then he decides whether ... according to that ... according to the situation, well. He is usually told to leave the social center and the next day to come, that we can talk about it, or there are various alternatives.“ Respondent No. 3 compares this with other services which solve a gross violation of the rules by preventing the use of the service or prohibiting it: „They're used to bringing wine, if I bring it there, I'll get a ban on entry. We keep debating with them here, don't be silly, like, don't drink it here, and he emphasizes that the worker in particular must lead by example to other clients: „I always try to say, as clients ... like let's not make our addictions (...) much public. It is then stupidly said (...) do not drink here when I have beer in the fridge.“ A dále uvádí, jak porušení pravidel řeší: „Instead of prohibitions, I just use it as a sentence, just go think for four days if you want to spend that time here with us or not.“ Clients also say that they

are reluctant to approach the ban: „*We are very careful with the ban“ and that he tries to solve everything in a good way.* Gradually, there are more and more rules that prove necessary, as stated by respondent No. 3: „*We imagined from the beginning that it would work differently, that it would be so looser, but experience shows us that it can't be so looser, that there simply has to be some rules here.*“

We called the third category of topics **challenges and obstacles**. We are referring to the challenges faced by social workers by clients, as well as the obstacles to client participation.

**Passivity:** The passivity and independence of many clients is another challenge for social workers. Respondent No. 1 states it as follows: „*It really sometimes takes a long time before the relationship and trust and so on are formed, and the person may need to move somewhere further or get involved in the organization more.*“ He also states that this is a long-standing habit of users of social services: „*A person is used to (...) the rules that give him clear boundaries, you don't have to have a choice for yourself, and if you just don't have a choice for those 15 years, you're also used to it, you can't actually choose.*“ This inability of clients employs social workers at the expense of social work: „*Then you really seem to end up that day washing and running from A to Z and actually doing very little social work.*“ According to respondent No. 2, this problem can be called dependence on social services: „*I always say that in those 25 years we have become addicted to social services here.* According to him, people who do not have any higher goals in life are subject to this addiction: „*The social support is enough for me, I have food everywhere here, so ..., he just wants to live, to live well, happily, just like ... he really is, in those 10, 15 years ... you will learn to live in that environment so much that it is already a natural environment for them* “. To the question whether the passivity cannot be a manifestation of resignation in an unsolvable life situation, respondent No. 3 answers: „*Because I think there are people like there who can't really be elsewhere, because they have bans everywhere because of something, so it's that there are enough of those clients, even if there's chaos, even though there's a lot of noise and swearing, and so on. , so I think they did quite a bit of work on themselves.*“

**More and more:** A similar problem, related to living in permanent insecurity and using social services, is the habit of taking as much as possible from everything, because one never knows when one will be in need. Respondent No. 1 explains this on the example of clothing: „*People on the street are used to surviving and don't think they should take one sweatshirt and there will be another 20 tomorrow and I can do it here in peace and I don't have to worry that someone will take my sweatshirt, but they'd better take 4 sweatshirts, because they just don't know how it will go.*“ He also states, on the example of hygiene packages, that such situations lead to confusion: „*You get something as if you sold it, be it shampoo. I don't care, it's his, so why judge him. But then, so that he doesn't come again and say: I want for a friend, I want for my mom, I want for my grandmother, for my aunt, and suddenly there just starts to be such a mess.*“ In his own words, he would like everyone to take only what they really need, and not have to approach the allocation: „*I want it to work so that (...) the moment I just don't have toothpaste, I'll just come, look, there's toothpaste there, yeah, we have.*“ Respondent No. 2 sees progress: „*I think it's pretty much better. As if they understood that if they came to us, they would not always get much.*“ And sometimes the feeling, as the respondent said: „*The more they get, the more they want. Furthur more, more and more.*“ Another social worker, respondent No. 4, sees this from a vantage point: „*It will really take an awful long time, because I know that 25 years have been set up for it here, and maybe just like we're definitely doing it stupidly, we have to do better*“ and optimistically adds: „*It will be better, it will just take Langer.*“

**Aggression - conflicts:** Aggressive and conflicting client behavior is another challenge for social workers. Respondent No. 3 talked about the fact that someone just doesn't like anyone. Direct quote from a social worker from the experience of homelessness in the field: „*Because there may be people on the street who don't like them, so I try to explain to them that it's okay that you don't have to be nice, but try to respect each other. I'll explain it to them (...) and you don't have to attack right away, because you just don't like someone.*“

**Team support:** Respondents said that their work is psychologically demanding: „*The parti-*

icipatory approach is really challenging," says respondent No. 1 and gives a specific example: „Even if you ask those people what they would be interested in and then try to come up with something with them, then maybe they just won't come up with the activity, (...) it's also demotivating.“ The respondent emphasizes the importance of maintaining motivation: „The motivation, well ... I think it's important to just look for ways to just make it work. And with small steps, as if you don't really have high expectations.“ Respondent No. 2 also stated that direct work with clients is very demanding: „There's a lot going on that day, and now that it's too much for you, it's not funny at all.“ And that you need to work on yourself all the time: „We should probably learn to work with it a little bit better, because we have to give a little bit of respect, but some calm respect, and we should learn to control our emotions more.“ The respondent emphasizes the importance of supervision, as well as rest: „Then it is important that there is some kind of supervision that we do not like at all, because you speak, you speak, not everyone seems to like to speak and in fact understands it as if it were whole, kind of (...). Let it be rather a relaxation, rest, trip.“ According to another respondent, meetings and supervision should be more frequent: „I would give more meetings (...) and more supervision. So that we really seem to say some things in meetings which one receives from those clients, and it is simply directed to our team, for example.“

## Conclusion

Finally, we will try to answer the main research question:

***How do the social workers of a charity in the Prešov Region perceive the functioning of the participatory method in their daily practice?***, by answering two sub-research questions.

The first sub-question was: ***What are the challenges of a participatory approach from the perspective of the organization's social workers?***The interviews clearly show that a participatory approach in social work with the homeless requires great motivation and patience, both for workers and service users. A participatory approach is a long-term, challenging and essentially never-ending task. It very much depends on the recovery phase of the individual, while each in-

dividual has a different pace of recovery, which depends on many factors: length of stay on the street, health and mental condition, motivation... It would be interesting to find out to what extent the length of stay on the street affects the speed of recovery. Every homeless person needs a lot of patience and respect from social workers.

Interviews have also shown that street experience leads to the acquisition of certain anti-social behaviors such as ruthlessness towards others, the need to gain a lot for oneself at every opportunity, long-term aggression, a tendency to increase self-esteem by exalting oneself, or even criminal behavior. These problematic phenomena lead to the need to create stronger rules. However, the participatory approach is beneficial in that these rules are developed gradually in cooperation with users of the service. However, problematic behavior also disrupts relationships, both with social workers and between individual users. This creates constant tension and compromises the safety of the space. For workers, a patient and non-judgmental approach to some individuals can be a big challenge.

„Dependence on social services“ proved to be an important obstacle in the participatory process. The frequent habit of homeless people to the status of the recipient of assistance, conditioned by the fulfillment of given tasks, keeps these people in subordination, passivity and inability to make independent decisions and manage their lives. This problem is certainly not the fault of social workers, but rather the result of the overcrowding of these services and the need to focus on covering the most basic needs of clients at the expense of continuous individual or community work. Moreover, this passivity or resignation usually has deeper roots, dating back to before pre-homelessness. In any case, this is a major challenge for a participatory approach.

The second partial research question was: ***What is the benefit of a participatory approach from the point of view of social workers?***A participatory approach is, in essence, a bottom-up approach - its principle is to give people the space to define for themselves what they need and to be the main actors in their own empowering process. However, they also need a large amount of support and suitable conditions for this. The first condition is to ensure security - while maintaining the highest possible degree of freedom - and to satisfy

basic needs. Furthermore, a partnership approach is important, which leads to increasing the self-confidence of homeless people, to strengthening self-confidence, which are necessary conditions for one to find the strength to change and take one's own destiny into one's own hands.

Also, the possibility of self-choice and self-formulation of what I need and what I would like to achieve can lead to disruption of passivity and resignation. A person performs a role better if he chooses it of his own free will than a person whose role has been entrusted to him or forced by someone else. A person who "accepts the task", who enjoys the task and makes sense for it, has a much greater motivation to complete it. Such an approach also leads to an increase in self-worth, has a strengthening effect and therefore long-term sustainable results.

Respondents emphasized the importance of being able to empathize with homeless people and understand behaviors that may seem negative to employees. This understanding and insight are a huge benefit and a strength of social workers. Social workers can also be a motivation for others, a good example of what a homeless person can achieve. Above all, however, their work has an invaluable benefit for them. They were able to use that space and that support to get from the hopeless and humiliating situation of a homeless person who receives the help of others to the position of a helper. They were given the opportunity to use their unfortunate experience for the benefit of others and thus give it a certain meaning. They are real experts on homelessness and learn not to be ashamed of their experience. They receive the necessary support and awards from colleagues, not to mention an adequate financial evaluation. And their position is a constant challenge for them to move on, whether for work or "just" personally.

The participatory approach is, on the one hand, highly individualized, "human-oriented", "tailor-made". On the other hand, it is an important pillar of working with the community, which can lead to the fulfillment of the highest goal - self-help. As all interviews have shown, a community center can become a substitute home for many people, safe, welcoming and open at the same time. The community center enables and even supports the creation of an emotional relationship with the given space and with the people

who inhabit it, regardless of whether they are employees or clients. Social workers are aware that a participatory approach to working with homeless clients is challenging in practice. Nevertheless, individual social workers see progress, either in the form of obtaining housing or work, or in the form of a "mere" change in behavior or approach to oneself and others.

The question that has accompanied us since the beginning of the interest in the topic of participatory approach in social work with the homeless and which remains unanswered is: ***How could a participatory approach be introduced in organizations providing social services to a huge number of homeless people?*** I believe that this is possible, thanks to the example of the British organization St. Mungo's, which is a comparatively large colossus, yet is a role model in a participatory approach. Even from the interviews themselves, however, it turned out that such success does not arise by itself, but is, on the one hand, the result of many years of work and experience - in the case of St. Mungo's is 40 years of experience - and on the one hand it is conditioned by the development of the whole society that deals with social services.

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