

Art as Research in Social Work

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The House of The Homeless have taken up the model Peter and I used and want to make more projects of this type. I would like to try and describe what we did and how the project also became research in social work:

What we did from the beginning was to say, mostly to ourselves, that we are now teachers or social workers. We want to participate in the project on equal terms with the homeless – they have experiences and qualifications that we do not have and visa versa. By doing this we did not meet around a personal problem or history but was focused on making a project together. This I think created a situation where we “meet” as whole subjects and not in an “I have a problem” vs. “I can solve a problem” dichotomy which the normal meeting point between homeless and social worker. We did not know what problems they had and their personal background except from a few obvious things, like drug use.

We insisted throughout the process that Mia, Steen and Michael participated in all steps of the project. We did not want to decide matters without them. This came to a test in the long and tiresome editing process.

Once we decided for the video project, we decided that we did not want to show the homeless as victims. We wanted them to be active subjects that participated in democratic efforts and be part of the formation of reality. It is, was our experience, very easy to inscribe yourself into a victim position. But we proved that an active political subject position was possible as well!

Also, we put up the term that the project would take as long as it takes and that the pace was determined by the homeless. We expected the project to last 1-2 months but it needed 9 month before the TV programme was ready to be broadcasted!

They social worker of The House of The Homeless, Jørgen Torkelund, said that he could see that they three participants had “grown” and gained more self-confidence. He emphasised that the feeling of participating in a project where they are openly respected and has influence was important.

To participate in an art project and the space it offers often came up. Because of the prejudice about art we, Peter and I, were often framed in a way that opened up processes and ideas. The limitations that any process has were seen as different and more formable because we were artists!