

Background

KEG is a participatory health project and part of PartKommPlus, a German Research Consortium for Healthy Communities. The Consortium was founded in order to investigate the factors determining the successful implementation and maintenance of municipal health promotion strategies and how to engage a wide range of stakeholders in such strategies. KEG stands for development of municipal health promotion strategies. The project aims at investigating and supporting strategy development for health promotion in two neighbourhoods in the German cities of Hamburg and Esslingen. In the two neighbourhoods research-practice-partnerships have been set up at the interface of top-down and bottom-up. Research-practice partnerships are defined as collaborations between practitioners and academics. Cooperation partners are the Hamburg Association for Health Promotion, the Municipality of Esslingen and local stakeholders.

Set-up of research-practice partnerships

In Hamburg professionals from different levels take part in a so-called Interface Group. The members of the group posed the question of how the municipal health promotion strategy might be supported in the future and conducted interviews with local stakeholders using the Appreciative Inquiry Method. Citizens of the neighbourhood were engaged as co-researchers to conduct additional interviews among people in their own social environment. On the basis of these results, an instrument will be developed which can be used as an aid for decision-making and for advising municipal partners.

In Esslingen the Interface Group is organized by the City's Office of Social Affairs and Sports in collaboration with the academic partner. The members of the group are professionals from different sectors and stakeholders from the neighbourhood. Despite some start-up difficulties (e.g. misunderstandings concerning the project objectives), the Interface Group was able to build mutual trust and the decision was reached that the practical goal of the project would be further developing health promotion for neighbourhood youth in the context of their everyday lives. Youth were recruited as co-researchers and the photovoice method was used. The youth participated with a high level of commitment. Actually they take part in the Interface Group in order to represent their concerns and topics directly and communicate these to the various committees at the district level.

Lessons learned

Both case studies succeeded in further developing municipal health promotion by way of participatory research, which reflects a central goal of the Consortium. We learned that the preparatory phase requires more time than expected in order to establish a common ground and trust. The process gains new momentum when residents become active and the professionals search for starting points and solutions together with them. The collaborative process of action and reflection within the Interface Groups was central for this success, affirming the usual action-reflection cycle found in participatory research. These communicative processes in the Interface Groups are being documented by the academic partner and are shared regularly with the Interface Groups. The collaboration at the interface of top-down and bottom-up is challenging. The room for reflection should be institutionalized.

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Research-practice partnerships between Top-down and Bottom-up

Experiences from two case studies in Germany

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