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**When feminist standpoint epistemology and participatory  
research meet: towards knowledges that are more power-aware  
and inclusive**

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**An investigation of the research strategies adopted to produce power-aware and  
inclusive knowledge and how they play out in practice.**

**Jorinde Luyts**

**Master Thesis Gender Studies**

**Student number: 5646014**

**Thesis supervisor: Dr. Christine Quinan**

**Second reader: Dr. Edward Akintola Hubbard**

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## **Introduction**

Growing up, I have always seen my parents socially and politically engaged in the struggle against poverty and exclusion. They did and still do this through working for ATD Fourth World, an international NGO dedicated to the fight against poverty both in the global north and in the global south. My mother was particularly involved in different actions aiming for the recognition of the value of the knowledge and experience of people living in poverty. She got involved in several research projects using a participative research method called Merging of Knowledge (MoK), which was developed by ATD Fourth World in the 1990s with the objective of developing the knowledge of the poorest, creating a recognition for it in academia and enabling a real partnership with people living in poverty.

Having been raised in household in which this was a regular topic of discussion, I was surprised at how little attention was given to participatory research in my social sciences bachelor, in which we explored and learned how to do both qualitative and quantitative research. During my master in Gender Studies, I had a course specifically on feminist research practices which taught me a lot, but again did not address participatory research practices and what it could mean for feminist research. As I progressed in my master and learned more and more about feminist theory, feminist research, and feminist epistemology, it became increasingly clear to me that putting participatory research practices in conversation with feminist research practices could be very enriching, especially when thinking about how knowledge is produced, who produces it, for whom, and the power relations embedded therein. When I started to read more about standpoint theory and discovered the writings of Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway and Patricia Hill Collins, I was baffled by the extent to which it seemed to lay the theoretical foundations for participatory research.

Standpoint theory appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, and is defined by Harding as “a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power” (2004, p.1). It further claims that knowledge is always situated, challenging a positivist scientific neutrality, and states that oppression can be a source of critical insight, recognizing the knowledge of oppressed groups, especially women (Harding, 2004). Last but not least, it has also been presented as a way to empower these oppressed groups, through development of an “oppositional consciousness” (Collins, 1991). Participatory research arose in the 1980s, when discussions around how, why and with whom social research is done were peaking, notable because of the emergence of standpoint theory. As Reid notes, participatory research reconsiders “purposes of research, definitions of objectivity, power relations between

the researcher and the researched, ownerships of results, and the ethics of data collection and reporting” (2004, p.2), and tries to do deal with these questions and issues in a more power-aware and inclusive way. She further notes that it integrates subjectivity into its scientific analysis and involves a commitment to structural and social transformation in favor of oppressed groups while legitimizing the knowledge that they produce. Because of their critical perspective on traditional research methods, their shared critique of objectivity and scientific neutrality, their commitment to empowerment and social change through knowledge production, and because they both challenge the power relation between researcher and researched, I conclude that participatory research is a way to put standpoint theory into practice. This is why it is so important to explicitly bring these strands of theory and practice together, and see them as complementary.

The course addressing standpoint theory I took during my master did however not mention or look into participatory research practices, and most participatory research methods I know of do not make any reference standpoint theory or feminist research practices. I however always saw the link and the potentiality of bringing these two worlds together, which is what I will try to do in this thesis, building further on the work of Maria Mies, a pioneer of feminist action research (Mies, 1996, p.10), and of Patricia Maguire and Colleen Reid, who both practiced and theorized about feminist participatory research. In order to do so, I will look at two participatory methods, the Merging of Knowledge Approach and the MAG (Méthode d’Analyse en Groupe) Method and analyze how they line up with feminist standpoint theory.

The MAG Method was developed in the 80s in the University of Saint-Louis in Brussels. It was only in 2005 however that its methodology and principles were formalized into a book. In 2013, the ‘Réseau MAG’ was created, a network of researchers that aims for the “implementation and diffusion of forms of collective intelligence, sociology of intervention, participatory methods and the method of group analysis (MAG)” (Réseau MAG, 2016, translation mine). It is a very adaptable and flexible method and has been applied in varying ways according to the situation at hand, the timeframe, means available and the participants. This renders a feminist analysis and intervention on it quite useful as there is space to play with the method in order to suit the production of an intersectional, power-aware and inclusive knowledge. In broad terms, the method consists of bringing together twelve directly concerned actors by a certain social problem, and collectively analyzing stories brought by these participants, to build a collective sociological knowledge from there. It is thus an experience-based approach, defining itself as being bottom-up, with a method that

aims at creating an artificial equality between participants, in which everyone has the same time to speak and no opinion or intervention is valued over another. The MAG Method is thus particularly relevant to analyze, as its methodology raises questions about the power structures involved, the role of the researcher and questions of objectivity and interpretation, questions that are central in standpoint theory as well.

The Merging of Knowledge Approach started to take shape in the 90s when ATD Fourth World decided to bring together different actors to create a better understanding of poverty in order to be able to fight it better. Its method starts from the premise that there are three forms of knowledge: academic knowledge, knowledge gained from life experiences, and knowledge born out of action (Fourth World University Research Group, 2007). In order to bring these types of knowledge together, a research group was formed of academics, professionals working with people experiencing poverty, and people experiencing or having experienced poverty and exclusion themselves. Then, through all stages of the research process, the three groups of participants were involved, guided by a pedagogical team. Usually, reflection and analysis is first done in peer groups, after which the conclusions of the different groups are brought together and confronted to then reach common conclusions and learn from each other. Here again, it seems valuable to put this approach in conversation with feminist standpoint theory, bringing intersectionality and situated knowledges in as well, in order to see how it affects power structures, the definition of what is valid knowledge and to what extent it can reach those furthest removed from knowledge production. While the method has been primarily used by and for people living in poverty, I will argue further on in this thesis that it can be used with other groups or individuals as well, taking into consideration the multiple oppressions along lines of gender, race, class, sexuality or nationality one can face.

I chose these two methods for several reasons. Firstly, because I am quite familiar with both methods, knowing about the Mok Approach through my mother and having followed a course about the MAG Method. I also chose these two particular methods because they are quite different, allowing me to explore a larger variety of strategies. As will become apparent in my thesis, the MoK Approach goes more in depth when it comes to participation and is closer to standpoint theory, mainly because of its insistence on collective knowledge building in peer groups. Because it goes more in depth, the MoK approach takes a lot of time and resources, which are not always available when doing research. The MAG Method has the advantage of needing less time and resources and being very adaptable, and even though it goes less in depth, it can challenge the power relations between researchers and researched

and can bring different standpoints together to produce knowledge that is more inclusive than knowledge arising from traditional ways of doing research.

I will put feminist standpoint theory in conversation with the MoK approach and the MAG Method with two main objectives in mind. Firstly, I want to argue for a feminist adaptation and adoption of these methods through showing the affinities between feminist standpoint theory and these two participatory methods. Secondly, I hope that bringing them together will further our thinking on issues of power and knowledge within research, paving the way for new insights, different approaches and better research practices. In order to do this, I will answer the following research question:

How can feminist standpoint epistemology and feminist research practices on the one hand, and participatory research methodologies such as the Merging of Knowledge Approach and the MAG Method on the other, complement each other in their shared objective of producing knowledge in a more power-aware and inclusive way?

In order to do so, I brought together key texts on standpoint theory and put them in conversation with key texts about the Merging of Knowledge approach and the MAG Method, in order to compare, contrast and see how they can complement each other. To understand how these methods play out in practice, I conducted interviews with participants in two research projects: one using the MoK approach, and one applying the MAG Method. In Chapter 1, I present these two case studies and describe my methodology. In a second chapter, I define my theoretical framework and propose a short literature review investigating the state of research combining feminist theory and participatory research practices. The following chapters constitute the analytical part of my thesis, which is structured according to three sub-questions. In chapter 3, I look at how these methods define and characterize what is valid knowledge, and how this compares to feminist standpoint theory. Then in a following chapter, I will show how these methods address existing power relations, and how this compares to feminist research practices. In the last chapter, I will try to evaluate to what extent these methods empower or give a voice to those furthest removed from research and academic institutions, and ask whether this lines up with feminist understandings of empowerment and social change. The analytical chapters will be divided in four parts. The first three parts will compare and contrast how the MoK approach, the MAG Method and feminist standpoint epistemology address the sub-question at hand. The fourth part looks at the use of these

methods in practical terms through the EQUIhealThY project and the project at l'ilot, in order to identify good practices and the difficulties that can arise in these types of endeavors.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Methodology**

Before presenting my methodological approach, this chapter will introduce the two case studies I will be looking at: the EQUIhealThY project, an academic research carried out using the MoK approach and the project at l'ilot, where the MAG Method was applied.

The first case study is the EQUIhealThY project, a research project carried out in the province of Quebec in Canada which started in 2012 and lasted more than two years. Through integrating the merging of knowledge approach in its methodology, it sought to explore the perceived barriers to healthcare for persons living in poverty in Quebec (Loignon, Hudon, Goulet, Boyer, De Laat, Fournier, Grabovschi and Bush, 2015). Because it is very recent and because the MoK approach is thoroughly applied, it makes for a very suitable case study in the context of this thesis. Furthermore, the different participants are currently involved in critical evaluation of the research process of the EQUIhealThY project, thinking about power relations, what is valid knowledge and looking at the impact it had on people and structures, which makes their reflections in the interviews and discussion we had very valuable.

The second case study is a project carried out by the 'Réseau MAG', a nonprofit organization constituted of a network of researchers that offers its services to different types of organization to analyze a specific social problem with which they are concerned and find tools for action (Réseau MAG, 2016a). Their interventions are very strongly based on the MAG Method and adaptations thereof. The group analysis I will examine was carried out early in 2016 at l'ilot, a nonprofit organization offering accommodation and several other services to people who are homeless (l'ilot, 2016). Its objective was to think about the place and role of those who use the services provided by l'ilot (Réseau MAG, 2016b) through a group analysis which brought together researchers of the Réseau MAG, employees of l'ilot and a few people who had used its services in the past. Here again, because it is very recent and because it involved people that were relatively marginalized, it is a very relevant case study for this thesis, as it allowed me to get a better idea of how power relations are dealt with in practice, and to what extent a democratization of knowledge is taking place. It is important



to note however that this particular intervention had the objective of producing practical knowledge about how to go about improving the services provided by l'ilot, rather than academic knowledge. This offer an interesting comparison with the MoK approach and the EQUIhealThY project, as its main objective was to produce academic knowledge.

When looking at the way knowledge is conceptualized, how power relations are dealt with and the objectives of social change and empowerment within the MoK approach, the MAG Method and feminist theory and practice, I will base myself on a close reading of the foundational texts about both methods. For both the MAG Method and the MoK approach, I will focus on texts that directly deal with the method, rather than on research or articles that use it, as I want to focus on the methodological approach and I estimate that the case studies provide me with enough insight about their putting in practice. For the MoK approach, one of my main sources will be the general introduction of the book *The Merging of Knowledge*, written by the Fourth World-University Research Group (2007), which is composed of the different participants of the first project that used and developed the merging of knowledge approach in the early 1990s. In addition to this, I will rely heavily on the *Guidelines for the Merging of Knowledge and Practices*, a document that can be found on the website of ATD Fourth World, the organization that developed the MoK approach. Finally, I will also look at an article written specifically on the methodology used in the EQUIhealThY project (De Laet, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet, Loignon, 2014). For the MAG Method, I will almost exclusively use a book titled *La Méthode d'analyse en groupe: Application aux phénomènes sociaux*, written by Luc Van Campenhoudt, Jean-Michel Chaumont and Abraham Franssen (2005), who were part of the team of researcher which developed the method in the 1980s at the University of Saint-Louis in Brussels, as there are no other texts specifically about its methodology.

In terms of feminist theory, I chose to focus on standpoint epistemology, as I found that this branch of feminist epistemology was most compatible with the ideas underlining participatory research. Standpoint theory shares with participatory research its critiques of objectivity, its valuing of knowledge gained from experience, and its commitment to social change. I will mainly draw on Sandra Harding's, Donna Haraway's, and Patricia Hill Collins' writings on the subject, as they made major contributions to the field.

In addition to the texts on methodology about the two methods, I collected information and insights from the participants of the EQUIhealThY Project and the group analysis at l'ilot. This allowed me to get an idea of how the Mok approach and the MAG method are actually

carried out and how the co-production of knowledge, power relations, social change and empowerment play out in practice. It also revealed more clearly what differentiates both methods, their strengths and weaknesses, and gave valuable insights about the dos and do nots when it comes to collectively producing knowledge.

For the EQUiheaThY Project, I was put in touch with the different co-researchers of the project through my mother, who was one of them. As part of ATD Fourth World, the organization that developed the approach, she and her colleague worked together with two academic researchers to put the project in place. They were also part of the “Steering Panel” (Loignon, Hudon, Goulet, Lambert, Boyer, de Laat, Dupont, Fournier and Fournier, 2015, translation mine), which was also composed of two people in situation of poverty, a healthcare professional and two researchers. The fact that my mother was involved in the project has of course its importance. While keeping a critical approach, it has encouraged me to be as constructive as possible in this thesis, in the hope that my input will be useful for future research. I have however been careful to write this thesis independently, limiting her involvement throughout the process.

At the time when I contacted the Steering Panel, they had just begun to evaluate the project and to reflect upon the whole research process with the help of Marion Carrel, a sociologist at the University of Lille 3, who specializes in questions of participation, empowerment, poverty and citizenship. She had conducted interviews with the different members of the Steering Panel in peer groups, and offered me the reports of these interviews to use in this thesis. I was also invited to a skype meeting between the different members that had been part of the steering panel to further discuss the interviews. All the participants accepted my presence at the meeting and gave me permission to use the reports of their interviews. While these reports are not a full transcription of the interviews, they stay very close to it and have been validated afterwards by each of the interviewees. These reports thus represent and transmit their thoughts very accurately.

In a second phase of data collection, and in order to try to apply the principles of participatory research as much as possible to my own thesis, I sent to each participant, seven in total, the preliminary observations, interpretations and conclusions I made based on the interviews and the skype meeting. They were asked to read my text, in the form of bullet points, identify what they disagreed with, complement a point if they felt something was missing and indicate which parts they found particularly relevant or important. I then took this into account when writing my final analysis. In addition to this, I also asked a few supplementary questions that had not yet been answered through the interviews. The

participants could give me their feedback and answers to the questions in written form or could schedule a skype meeting, which the people in situation of poverty and the members of ATD Fourth World did. The nurse involved responded to me in writing, while both researchers were unfortunately too busy to respond. The interview transcripts of Marion Carrel, the skype meeting I attended and the oral and written responses to my conclusions and interpretations are thus the data I will be working with for the EQUIhealThY project.

In order to look at the group analysis that was carried out at l'ilot by the Réseau MAG, I carried out four individual interviews with different participants. One was a researcher, one was part of the direction of l'ilot, and two were part of the administrative staff. Each interview lasted about half an hour, and the questions were slightly adapted each time according to the role within the group analysis and the social position of each participant. All interviews were done in person. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Due to a lack of time, I was not able to go through the same validation process as was done with the EQUIhealThY Project. In this case it was however less necessary, as the participants, with the exception of the researcher, were not directly involved in the elaboration of the method or the formulation of the research question, and were thus significantly less invested in the methodological aspect of the group analysis.

For both case studies, I will not name anyone when referring to the interviews, and will only indicate the position of the person in question and sometimes their gender, in order to protect anonymity.

Last but not least, language is closely linked to the perpetuation of power relations and in- and exclusions, as I will briefly discuss in the following chapters. I thus aim to be aware of the language that I use to write this thesis, by shortening my sentences and avoiding overly complicated words when they are not necessary, in the hope that it becomes accessible to as wide a public as possible. This has of course its limits. It remains a long scientific piece of writing, which requires an advanced level of literacy and a mastery of the English language. I consider, however, that it is still an effort that should be made.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Through this literature review, I would like to show the affinity between feminist research and its guiding principles and participatory research and its guiding principles. I will start by giving a review of how feminist research has been thought about and defined, to then do the same thing for participatory research, in order to compare their foundations, theoretical frameworks and principles. This is important, as it can give insights on how knowledge can be produced differently, making the process more inclusive and power aware. In the last part of this chapter, I will offer a brief overview of instances where both strands of research have been brought together and combined, leading to a feminist participatory praxis in research.

In order to define and characterize feminist research it is useful to start by defining epistemology, methodology and method, which inform and form feminist inquiry. Harding defines epistemology as a “theory of knowledge” (1987, p.3), which defines what can be known and who can be a knower. The epistemology one relies on has crucial implications for the methodology and the methods one will use. A methodology can be defined as a “theory or analysis of how research does or should proceed” (Harding, 1987, p.3), and a method is the specific technique one uses to gather evidence. While there is a general consensus on the fact that there is no such thing as a feminist method of enquiry (Harding, 1987; Letherby 2003), and the existence of a feminist epistemology or methodology is debated, there is such thing as a ‘feminist research practice’ that can be distinguished from traditional research (Letherby, 2003). Of course, there is no unified way of doing feminist research, and there is no single feminist epistemology or methodology either (Hesse-Biber, 2007), but a certain number of commonalities which characterize feminist research have been identified, which I will look at here.

What makes research feminist? An important and often cited characteristic of feminist research is that gender and women are at the center of its analysis (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991). As Hesse-Biber (2007) notes, feminist research emerged out of a criticism of the androcentric bias within the sciences. It is mainly feminist empiricists that were concerned with this. They added women in research samples, asked questions that highlighted women’s experiences and perspectives and included gender as a category of analysis. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) add to this that feminist research should contribute to women’s liberation. This idea that feminist research is not neutral and should contribute to social change and justice has been often cited as one of its characteristics as well (Hesse-Biber, 2007). As Harding (1991) argues, neutrality is not something that standpoint theory wants to attain. On

the contrary she argues that feminist politics are necessary to produce less partial and distorted knowledge. Collins further argues that “knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of dominance and resistance” (1990, p.221) and deems black feminist thought to be an essential to the empowerment of black women in the United States. Another distinctive feature is that it challenges traditional ways of knowledge building, taking up issues of power and subjectivity. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) underline feminist research’s usage of non-oppressive methods of inquiry, and Letherby (2003) considers that the central feature of feminist research is that it is “respectful of respondents and acknowledges the subjective involvement of the researcher”. Furthermore, feminist research is also characterized by an active search to counter the power balance between researcher and object of research (Brayton, Ollivier and Robbins, 2005). As Hesse-Biber (2007) thus summarizes, feminist research is about finding ways to get at subjugated knowledges, a concern with issues of power, subjectivity, ethics and reflexivity, and a search for social change.

Participatory research is a “joint process of knowledge-production” (Bergold and Thomas, 2012) which moves away from a positivist interpretations of social reality, recognizes the capability of subjects to analyze their reality in an attempt to democratize the production of knowledge, and aims at empowering people oppressed by the dominant paradigm. Its different ramifications were very much inspired by Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1978), in which he argues for the breaking down of a vertical structure of education with a teacher imposing knowledge on a student, in order to get to a more horizontal structure of dialogue, mutual learning and collective production of knowledge. As Bergold and Thomas (2012) note, participatory research manifests itself through multiple participatory research strategies that cannot be canonized because they are always reinvented and co-determined to fit the particular research done and the people involved. Just like feminist research, there is thus not a single method for doing participatory research but a number of defining features and principles have still been identified in terms of methodology and epistemology.

In her ‘SAGE Handbook for Participatory Action Research’, Hilary Bradbury (2015) identifies the core principles of participatory research. According to her, a main feature is its participative and democratic modality, with an objective to work with participants rather than ‘on’ or ‘for’ them, based on the idea that the self is relational and that there are multiple

subjectivities. It is directly linked to the recognition of knowledges derived from experience and practice, and the recognition of the capacity of the people in the particular context studied to participate and contribute to the research process (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2013). The second feature Bradbury identifies is “the primacy of practical contribution” (2015, p.7) in participatory research, meaning that it aims at producing knowledge that is emancipatory and rooted in action. Bergold and Thomas (2012) make a distinction between participatory research and action research. They argue that participatory research makes a shift from a focus on action to a focus on collaborative research practices. Nevertheless, it still aims at understanding how social structures, ideologies and processes of meaning-making interlock and are at the source of different forms of oppression or social problems, which then makes change possible (Park, 1999).

When one puts the principles and methodologies of feminist research and participatory research next to one another, it becomes rather evident that there are a lot of overlaps. As Reid argues, they both “seek to shift the center from which knowledge is generated” (2004, p.4), and try to redefine the way in which research should be done. According to me, this is what explains their affinity and the numerous overlaps that can be identified. Both for example critique positivism and challenge conceptions of objectivity by integrating questions of subjectivity and the relational in their analysis (Lather, 1991; Reid, 2004). The critique of positivism and value-free science has not been shared by all feminist researchers, but there is a large the feminist movement, involving figures such as Harding and Haraway that does, and informs large strands of feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2012). A direct consequence of this critique of positivism is a critique of dualisms, amongst which the subject/object of research divide and the theory/practice divide, which can be found in both strands of research.

Of course, differences between participatory research and feminist research can be identified as well. Participatory research has been criticized by feminists for its androcentric bias, neglecting women’s voices and lacking an analysis of domination in terms of gender (Maguire, 1987; Reid, 2004). Feminist research on the other hand, while it does challenge traditional methods of doing research, rarely uses strong participatory methods and lack the action component that participatory research usually has (Reid, 2004). As Harding argues, feminist research has not “given adequate attention to the envisioning of truly emancipatory knowledge-seeking” (1986, p.19). This is why feminist research and participatory research can mutually enrich and complement each other in their shared goal of producing a more

power-aware and inclusive knowledge and to induce social change. Relatively little theorizing and inquiry has however been done at the intersection of both strands of research, and there is still little visibility of feminist researchers engaging in participatory research practices within participatory research (Lykes and Hershberg, 2012). A main figure that has been working at the interface between feminist research and participatory research is Maguire, who criticizes the androcentric bias of participatory research and carried out research at the interface of both strands of research, with battered women in New Mexico (Maguire, 1987). Others have also written about the principles, possibilities and challenges that a feminist approach to participatory research entail. Colleen Reid (2004) in particular developed a framework for feminist action research (FAR). Together with Allison Tom and Wendy Frisby (2006) she put it into practice with a group of women on low income in Canada with the objective of reducing isolation and other health problems. On the other side of the world, Bev Gatenby and Maria Humphries (2000) also carried out research that drew both on participatory action research and feminist research and explored the methodological and ethical issues that this involved.

Since the 2000's there has thus been a raising interest in a feminist take on participatory research methods. I would like to contribute to this literature by bringing in two participatory research methods that do not explicitly draw on feminist theory and putting them in conversation with feminist standpoint theory. From there I hope to derive some conclusions about what is needed to and how to go about doing research in an inclusive and power aware way that can be useful both for the further development of the MoK approach and the MAG Method, and for feminist research practices.

### **Chapter 3** **(Re)defining valid knowledge**

#### **Merging of Knowledge (MoK) and its approach to knowledge production**

The MoK approach starts from the principle that every person possesses knowledge and has the potential to understand and interpret their own situation (de Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon, 2014). Joseph Wresinski, the founder of ATD Fourth World, expressed in 1980 at UNESCO the need to “make room for the knowledge of the very poor and excluded” and “to re-evaluate this knowledge as unique, indispensable, autonomous and a complement to all other forms of knowledge, and to help develop it” (Ferrand, 2007).

Subsequently, he identified three forms of knowledge: the knowledge of people living in poverty, the knowledge of people working with people living in poverty and the knowledge of academics. While I didn't find an explicit definition of knowledge in the writing about the MoK approach, one of the ATD Fourth world volunteers shared with me the words of Luigi Mosca at a seminar on this method. He said that knowledge should be that which makes us understand reality better, which seems to align with the understanding of knowledge as implied in the MoK approach.

Merging knowledge has the objective to bring these three types of knowledge together to co-create pieces of research. This is a very class-based analysis, and other axes of oppression should not be forgotten. I would argue that the focus on class could be shifted to a focus on gender or race depending on the research that is carried out and the objectives that are pursued. Different classifications of knowledge are thus possible and necessary. Merging these different knowledges means “exposing oneself to the knowledge and experience of others in order to build knowledge that is more complete and greater than the sum of its parts” (ATD Fourth World, 2006). This is however not possible by simply adding them up. Merging of knowledges necessitates a confrontation of these different knowledges. It is the identification and addressing of disagreement that allows for a deconstruction of the different standpoints to then construct not only a common product of research, but also reconstruct one's own knowledge, informed by the other standpoints (De Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon, 2014).

More than individual knowledge, the MoK approach is focused on the development of a collective knowledge of people in situation of poverty and extreme poverty. ATD Fourth World defines poverty as “a human condition characterised by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” (International Movement ATD Fourth World, 2014, p.43), a definition that was also adopted by the UN. One of the principles in the Merging of Knowledge Guidelines chart is that “nobody should be left on their own” (ATD Fourth World, 2006). According to this principle, the sense of belonging to a social or professional group reinforces the knowledge that each person individually possesses as it allows them to build on the experience of others in a similar situation. People in situation of poverty that participate should be linked to a group, in contact with other people in situation of poverty and still evolve within that social environment (De Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet, Loignon, 2014). A central feature of the MoK



approach is the creation of “reference groups” (ATD Fourth World, 2006), to allow for this construction of a collective knowledge. These reference groups are groups of peers who share a similar social position, such as professionals, academics or people in situation of poverty. According to the approach, an individual reflection, followed by reflection within one’s references group is necessary to compare experiences and reach common conclusions before a merging of different types of knowledge is possible.

Another central and specific feature of the MoK approach is that it requires the presence of “discussion facilitators” or a “pedagogical team” (ATD Fourth World, 2006) to facilitate the confrontation of the different types of knowledge, namely the knowledge of people in situation of poverty and the knowledge of academics and practitioners. In EQUihealthY, the research I will use as a case study, this aspect of the approach was often referred to as “the bridge” (Carrel, Loignon, Hudon, Fournier, Chaput Fournier, Boyer and de Laat, 2016). The role of the bridge is to make sure a dialogue can take place, by trying to give every voice the same weight and by pushing the participants to find a common language. Indeed, the knowledge of people in situation of poverty, of practitioners or of academics is not expressed in the same way. The pedagogical team is there to support people in situation of poverty in the formulation and expression of their knowledge without speaking in their place and to support academics and practitioners to express their knowledge in a more accessible way so they can understand each other and a that a real dialogue can take place and an inclusive collective knowledge can be built. This, according to the MoK approach is an essential to guarantee a real dialogue and allow for a merging of the different types of knowledge (ATD Fourth World, 2006).

In sum, the MoK approach is based on the principle that everyone has knowledge and the potential to reflect up on it. In addition, this knowledge and reflection is strengthened when it becomes collective and is constructed and developed within a peer group. It identifies three types of knowledge; that of the people in situation of poverty, that of practitioners and that of academics. Bringing together and confronting these types of knowledge leads to a more complete understanding of the social reality studied and a better understanding of standpoint of the other participants. In the EQUihealthY project for example, people living in poverty said they understood better the world of the researchers, while the researchers and practitioners pointed out that they had a better understanding of poverty (Carrel, 2016a). This merging of knowledges is however only possible with the presence of a ‘bridge’ that can facilitate the discussion and can push for finding a common language.

## **The MAG Method and its approach to knowledge production**

The MAG Method, or ‘Méthode d’Analyse en Groupe’ was developed in the 80s in the University of Saint-Louis in Brussels. It was a response to the postmodern turn taking place both in society and in academia, with a blurring of identity categories, the deepening of social inequalities, a greater focus on the individual and a conceptualization of the subject as thinking agent. They looked at inequalities mainly in terms of resources, but also relating to questions of identity. The founders of the method, Luc van Campenhoudt, Jean-Michel Chaumont and Abraham Franssen (2005), argue that the methodologies and methods relied upon by researchers have usually not kept up with contemporary theorization, especially when talking about conceptualizations of the subject as a “reflexive agent” (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005, p.34, translation mine), and a move away from positivism. The MAG Method is then a way to attune methodologies and methodological tools to the changes in society, social relations, and the way they are conceptualized.

A central principle of this method is thus the recognition of a reflexive subject. This means letting go of the idea that the researcher, through his methodology and knowledge can uncover the ultimate truth, and thus be objective, while other members of society cannot, and are subjective or in a state of false consciousness (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005). While the authors of the method do not make any reference to feminist epistemology, this principle resonates very strongly with standpoint epistemology. Haraway questioned this question of objectivity and absolute truth as well, insisting on the “embodiment of all vision” (1988, p.582). Knowledge can thus be achieved by anyone, but will always be situated and partial. Starting from this principle, it brings together the different actors concerned, and through an approach in different steps, pushes them to mobilize their reflexive, interpretative and analytical capacities. It is an inductive approach, starting from the participants’ own experiences in story form, followed by several rounds of interpretations by the different participants, which then leads to the elaboration of a common analysis. However, as van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen note, their point of view is necessarily situated, partial and can be one-sided. They write:

“Neither totally alienated or completely lucid and sovereign, individuals are both constrained and agents, instituted and instituting, partly unconscious of themselves and capable of lucidity and reflexivity” (2005, p.35, translation mine)

This capacity of reflexivity, according to them, can only be exercised under certain conditions I will now explore. It is these conditions that the method tries to put in place, through a structured debate and the different steps followed leading up to the analysis.

A crucial aspect of the method that mobilizes the participant's reflexive capacities and allows for a complex and deep understanding of the object of study is that it allows for intersubjectivity. Through the confrontation of the different interpretations of the experience related, and the highlighting of convergences and divergences between these interpretations at the phase of analysis, knowledge which allows for complexity, taking into account different standpoints and providing an understanding of the social relations involved. The method assumes a paradigm of conflict, conceptualizing social relations as a game of cooperation and conflict between different social actors that make up society (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005). This echoes one of the principles of the method, which is "conflictual cooperation" (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005, p.37, translation mine). They consider that through the confrontation of different points of view a more complete understanding of the situation is possible, arguing for example that bringing together bankers and debtors gave a more complete picture of the problem of indebtedness. It is however not about finding a consensus or a common standpoint; the aim is to agree upon the convergences and divergences in interpretations in order to uncover the different logics and standpoints of the participants. This then allows for a comprehensive approach to the situation that is analyzed.

To bring this all together, the MAG Method challenges positivist approaches to the production of knowledge that assume there is a truth out there to be uncovered by the researcher. Instead, it affirms the reflexive and analytical capacity of the subject to interpret their own situation, knowing that their knowledge is still partial and situated. The principle of 'conflictual cooperation', where different subjectivities meet and confront each other is then central to co-produce an analysis of the object of study that is as complete and complex as possible.

### **Affinities and differences with standpoint epistemology**

As I noted in the elaboration of my theoretical framework, feminist research is heterogeneous, and so are the methodologies that it adopts. I would like to focus here on standpoint epistemology because of the way it conceptualizes knowledge, objectivity and

epistemic agency, challenging traditional ways of doing research. As we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, the critiques of traditional ways of thinking about knowledge and producing knowledge is also the epistemological ground on which the MoK Approach and the MAG Method are based, challenging the relation between researcher and researched, recognizing different types of knowledge and valuing experience. In this section, I would thus like to look at the affinities between these methods and some major works on feminist epistemology, in order to argue for a wider adoption of these kinds of participatory methods within feminist research on the one hand, and improving these methods by evaluating them through a feminist lens on the other hand.

The link between feminist standpoint epistemology and participatory research methods is not automatically made. While feminist standpoint epistemology focuses on women's standpoints, this is not the case for the MoK approach or the MAG Method. In her accounts on the 'modest witness', Donna Haraway (1997) shows how science has consistently excluded women and argues that gender was central in our understanding of what can count as knowledge in modern science. Sandra Harding (1991), in her early writings on feminist standpoint epistemology, argued women's lives and standpoints should be the place from which feminist research should begin in order to criticize dominant knowledge claims. However, even if gender is an important category of analysis informing feminist standpoint epistemology, Alcoff and Potter point out that gender is only a "component of a complex system of identification and hierarchy" (1993, p.3), and that feminist epistemology thus takes gender as one axis of analysis amongst others. The MoK approach has been developed and used up until now taking class, or more precisely poverty, as a primary category of analysis. This does not mean, however, that this cannot be shifted and adapted according to what axis appears most relevant for the specific analysis one wants to carry out. In the MAG Method, there is no explicit attention given to subjugated knowledges, the method only specifying that the groups that are constituted should be as diverse as possible (van Campenhout, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005). Bringing in feminist standpoint theory and an intersectional approach, showing how gender, but also other axis of differentiation, such as race, class or sexuality influence knowledge production can then be useful to think more about the composition of the group and can favor a greater sensibility to subjugated knowledges when the researcher produces their analysis.

The relevance of the MoK approach and the MAG Method for feminist research becomes very apparent when looking at feminist standpoint theory and the different ways

feminist theorists have thought about objectivity, who can be a knower and what can be known. Even though the MoK approach does not explicitly draw on feminist standpoint theory, the method seems to follow its principles with the exception that instead of starting from the lives of women, it starts from the lives and knowledge of people in situation of poverty. One of standpoint theory's main claims is that knowledge is socially situated. Harding has pointed out that "to the extent that an oppressed group's situation is different from that of the dominant group, its dominated situation enables the production of distinctive kinds of knowledge" (2004, p.7). This resonates very strongly with the MoK approach, which distinguishes between three different types of knowledge, recognizing the knowledge of an oppressed group: people in situation of poverty. Just like Patricia Hill Collins (1991) argues when talking about black women's standpoints, the MoK approach takes as theoretical underpinning that different life experiences are at the root of these distinctive and collective knowledges. Both the MAG Method and the MoK Approach also stray away from the search for absolute truth and objectivity through what Haraway calls a "god trick" (1988, p.581) or the ability to see everything from nowhere. Instead, they recognize that knowledges are situated and that the "knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simple there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (Haraway, 1988, p.586). Indeed, both methods aim at seeing together, one by merging knowledges, the other by identifying convergences and divergences in the interpretation of different participants to create a common analysis.

### **From theory to practice: how knowledge is produced**

This section will explore the conditions necessary to produce valid knowledge, based on the interviews and discussions with the participants of both case studies. First, it will show how the MAG Method and the MoK approach inform us about the importance of time, the necessity to confront different standpoints, and the role of emotion in the process of going from experience to knowledge. As Harding (1991) argues, a feminist standpoint is an achievement and cannot just be claimed based on identity or social position. Experiencing oppression is thus not enough, and it takes a certain number of things, which will be discussed below, to go from experience to a situated knowledge.

Throughout my interviews and discussion, it became clear that time is central when it comes to doing participatory research. More time has to be taken than traditional ways of

doing research if an in depth participation is to be reached. In all the interviews done by Marion Carrel with the different parties of the EQUIhealThY project, it was underlined how much time the whole process took. The researchers described it as “long and arduous” (researcher 1, 2016, translation mine), and underlined that this put pressure on them, as academia expects a high publication rate and doesn’t recognize “the intensity of what it takes to do participatory research” (researcher 2, 2016, translation mine). The health professional mentioned as well the difficulties of balancing her job with the research project. All participants however agreed that taking time is a necessity if you want everyone to contribute. Both people living in poverty I interviewed and asked how they went from their experience to building up a collective knowledge said that time was the main answer, in particular time in peer groups, to share and analyze their experiences. Even though the MAG method is drastically shorter, and the project at l’ilot was spread over three days compared to two year for the the EQUIhealThY project, time was also an important topic during my interviews with its participants. While one of the participants working at l’ilot deemed that the process took a lot of time, others considered that it had been too short to really go in depth or that they needed more time to structure their thoughts. In addition, the researcher mentioned the short time as being a challenge when it came to producing the analyses.

It becomes clear that producing knowledge in a participatory way requires more time than traditional ways of doing research, and this for several reasons. Firstly, because producing knowledge collectively entails a conversation and a confrontation about the experiences, opinions and logics that the participants have. This is why the MAG method necessitates several rounds in which every person can speak, in order to allow people to respond to each other and identify diverging standpoints, and why it took about two years to reach a common analysis in the EQUIhealThY project. Both case studies show however that the confrontation of diverging standpoints, or “the clash of cultures” (participant 1, 2016, translation mine), as one of the people living in poverty who participated in the EQUIhealThY project called it, is essential when it comes to producing knowledge together. As the researcher of the MAG method pointed out, identifying the tensions between the different logics of the participants is very productive, as it allows the identification of the issues at play. In the same vain, a volunteer of ATD Fourth world involved in the EQUIhealThY argued that “[they] only started to really move forward when [they] dared to confront each other” (volunteer 1, 2016, translation mine). The interviews show however that an actual confrontation of standpoints and explicit disagreement do not automatically come to the surface. As the researcher using the MAG method noted, even if there is disagreement, it is

often not addressed directly, as “conflict costs more than cooperation” (researcher 1, 2016, translation mine), meaning that it is easier to agree on things than to enter a dialogue. One of the participants in the project with l’ilot said that there was a lack of explicit controversy, arguing that it was present below the surface but did not come out in the discussions. Time is thus needed to go below the surface and uncover the tensions and disagreements that exist and confront them.

Another reason why these participatory processes take more time is because its validity relies on the validation of all those involved of the conclusions made. While in the MAG Method the analysis is made by the researchers, they are accountable to the other participants, who have to agree with the analysis and the objective being to reach more general conclusions while staying faithful to what has been said (researcher MAG, 2016). Every single analysis has to be validated by the participants. In a similar vein, the second volunteer of ATD Fourth World commented on my interpretation and conclusions, said that merging knowledge not only implies a redefinition of what scientific knowledge is and who can produce it, but that it also entails a merging of “criteria of validity” (volunteer 2, 2016, translation mine). My interpretation here is that this means that the knowledge that is produced should not only be considered valid by academia and the scientific community, but in the case of the EQUihealthY project, also by the professionals and people living in poverty involved.

It appeared as well from the interviews of the MoK approach that emotions and the expression of these are an inherent part of the knowledge production process. Participant 1 argued this was because they had to start from their own experiences, and their own life, and there was a limit to the distance you can take when doing this. In the EQUihealthY project, they explained that emotion was mainly present in their peer group of people living in poverty. As participant 2, part of the peer group of people living in poverty argued, it is through finding the cause of their emotion and by explaining it that they build knowledge together:

“We managed to delve deeper and find the source, and were able to describe it as knowledge. It’s about finding the source, the root which caused the rise of emotions. It’s frustration, anger, ... It’s when you can’t anymore, you know, and it’s also your powerlessness facing the system. It’s about putting words on your anger, and that’s what knowledge is.” (participant 2, 2016, translation mine)

As they see it, emotion does not constitute knowledge as such but contains it. It is through a certain “filtering” (participant 1, 2016, translation mine) that was done in peer groups that scientifically valid knowledge was extracted. They were aware that they couldn’t solely rely on the emotion, and had to work with facts as well for a scientific base. Several feminist epistemologists, in their criticism of positivist postulates of truth and objectivity, also challenged the binary between emotion and rationality and argued for the recognition of the crucial role of emotion in the construction of knowledge. As rationality is associated with those dominating in society, and thus with whiteness and masculinity, recognizing the role of emotion can make space for oppressed groups to contribute to the production of knowledge (Jaggar, 1989). This, I would argue, is what the MoK approach allows to put into practice.

These two case studies putting into practice the MAG Method and the MoK approach thus allow me to identify some key conditions when it comes to producing knowledge in a participative and inclusive way. First of all, more time is needed than traditional research, to allow the different participants to get to know each other, build a trusting relationship and be able to confront their different standpoints. Another important condition is that the knowledge produced is not only considered scientifically valid by researchers and academics, but also by the different participants involved. Ideally, an explicit validation process should thus take place. Finally, the EQUIhealThY project in particular has shown that the role of emotions should not be neglected in the knowledge building process, as working through them is a source of knowledge.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Power relations and participation**

#### **The Merging of Knowledge approach on power relations**

The equality of different types of knowledge is the working hypothesis of the MoK approach. Its aim is to create a “structure of equal partnership between the poor and the academics” (ATD Fourth World, 2006, p4), in which everyone is respected and recognized as bringing an important contribution to the research project. This is however not a simple thing to do, and as the academic researchers and the volunteers of ATD Fourth World involved in the EQUIhealThY project in Canada argue, just bringing people together and working on a



common project is not enough to have a productive and equal exchange in which everyone can fully participate and be heard (De Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet, Loignon, 2014). This is, according to them, because of the inequality of positions and power differences, and the fact that the knowledge of some is socially more recognized than the knowledge of others. The MoK approach deals with these unequal power relations in different ways which I will now further explore, based on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity (ATD Fourth World, 2006). One of the things this means is that, to guarantee the greatest possible freedom of speech, no relation of dependency should exist between the academics, professionals and people in situation of poverty. Ideally, the participants do not know each other, or at least do not have a direct relationship such as a doctor-patient one. Of course, because participants are working together there is always a certain dependency, but this can be kept to a minimum.

The first way the MoK approach deals with unequal power relations is through the setting up of a pedagogical team. In the previous chapter, I discussed how its role is to make the link and operate as a sort of facilitator to allow for a mutual understanding of the different groups working together and in order to find a common language. This is however not their only function. The pedagogical team has the responsibility to warrant as much as possible the equal participation of the people involved and foster a dialogue between equals. It has to be composed of people familiar with both the realities of people in situation of poverty and academia and/or practitioners in order to be able to negotiate a way of doing that allows everyone to find their place in the process and to participate actively. One aspect of this is to find “fair means of expression” (Fourth World University Research Group, 2007), where speaking times are distributed as equally as possible and different forms of expression are combined, whether visual or written, in the form of debates or personal accounts, in order that each voice “carries the same weight” (ATD Fourth World 2006) and thus a same level of legitimacy. The objective is to arrive at a conversation between equals rather than a situation where people’s words are just taken as resources that can then be interpreted and analyzed by researchers. The pedagogical team also serves as a mediator and has to address conflicts or misunderstandings that arise along the way.

Another way in which the MoK approach tries to level out power differences and unequal social positions in the research process is by allowing the participants to prepare the different sessions in advance (Fourth World University Research Group, 2007). This is done first individually and then in peer groups. This way, everyone can work and think at their own

pace and structure their thoughts in order to be able to communicate them. Furthermore, the peer groups are a way for the participants to strengthen their position by building upon each and everyone's experiences to reach a collective and shared knowledge that carries more weight than individual voices. When the time of 'merging knowledge' comes, the playing field is then more level in terms of capacity of expression and reflection. The pace at which the research is carried out is also significant when talking about power relations. Taking more time allows for the active participation and involvement of participants who would otherwise experience difficulties with understanding, analysis or expression. As De Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon argue in their article, merging knowledge is a slow process which should respect each person's pace and adopt a "pedagogy of the slowest" (2014, p.85, translation mine) in which the tempo of every step in the process is adapted to the person which needs most time. This tends to make power relations between the different participants more balanced, as everyone is given the time and tools to have a say in all stages of the research process. This of course implies that more resources are needed and the overall process is slower, which academic researchers cannot always afford.

### **The MAG Method on power relations**

The MAG method has a "democratic ambition" (van Campenhoudt, Franssen and Chaumont, 2005, p.7, translation mine), which is not only about sharing knowledge, but also about sharing power. In the following chapter, I will try to give an overview of the way in which the method conceptualizes and deals with power relations, both between participants and between researchers and participants.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the MAG Method privileges the constitution of diversified groups in terms of social positions in order to have as many different points of view as possible on a specific issue. Giving all these people the status of participant does not erase differences and inequalities, and power relations do not all of the sudden disappear. Because the MAG Method functions on the principle of 'conflictual cooperation', the manifestation of these power relations are considered as a productive force, revealing the power dynamics at play in the issue that is analyzed (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005). The method however assumes that disagreement and resistance are verbalized, which I would argue is not always the case.

These power relations should however not stand in the way of a real dialogue in which every participant, and not only the dominant ones, can participate. To this end, the method aims to establish a ‘moral equality’ between participants, in which the participant’s “equal ability to assert their point of view” is recognized (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005, p.44, translation mine). Here, I would argue that all participants do not have this equal ability and being aware of this would allow compensating for that difference. Here is where an intersectional analysis would be useful, recognizing the location of each participant and the differences in experience, ability, and power this implicates. It is through the procedural rules of the method and their enforcement by the animator, that this equality is sought. The discussion, interpretation of stories and analysis take the form of an organized debate, in which speaking time is regulated, and everyone is asked to speak in turn. Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen argue that within this regulated space, “the usual power relations are artificially set aside” (2005, p.57, translation mine). It is here interesting to note that unlike the MoK approach, the MAG method assumes that this is enough to allow for the participation of all. This can be explained by the fact that it has been developed and used mainly with people working in the social sector and thus takes for granted that each participant has the necessary tools to participate in this type of discussion. While this is one of the limits to the method’s inclusiveness, it has been used, to give a few examples, with homeless people (Hermesse, 2005), people using food banks (Belleflamme, Chaidron and Depauw, 2012) and unemployed youth with low levels of education (Darquenne and Van Hemel, 2009). It seems however that in most cases, the method was adapted to fit the participants’ needs and abilities, and was complemented by other methods of scientific inquiry. Here is where feminist theory and epistemology can play a role, notably, Harding’s “strong reflexivity” (1993, p.69), which will be explored in the last section of this chapter.

With regards to the power relations between researchers and the other participants of a group analysis, the MAG method challenges the researcher/researched divide that can be found in more traditional ways of doing research, such as interviews or focus groups, where participants provide information and the researcher analyzes without much of a dialogue. In the MAG Method, the participants are involved in the production of this interpretations and analysis. Even though the researchers do produce the final report, their power is limited because they have to stay true to what has been said during the group analysis, and have to give a comprehensive account of what came out of it (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005). In addition to this, time has to be taken to allow the participants to give

feedback and check if it reflects accurately the group analysis that took place. Just like in the MoK approach, language is important, and the report has to stay close to the language used during the group analysis, avoiding unnecessary complicated terms in order to allow the participants to fully contribute and give feedback. This mandatory validation of the report by all participants is crucial when it comes to challenging the power relations that are usually in place between researchers and researched.

### **Affinities and differences with standpoint epistemology**

A significant amount has been written within feminist literature on power relations between researchers and researched. Sue Wilkinson notes that in feminist research, “both should be regarded as having the same status: as participants or collaborators in the same enterprise” (1986, p.13). Just like the MAG Method, feminists tend to reject the strict separation between researcher and researched and favor methods and ways of doing that give more power to the latter (Cancian, 1992). There is a wealth of literature on, for example, doing interviews. Oakley (1981) and Finch (1993) prefer interactions based on dialogue over formally structured interviews, because it avoids or tempers the creation of a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Wilkinson (1998) in turn, argues for a wider adoption of focus groups, especially self-managed focus groups as method of social enquiry, as they tend to shift the balance of power in favor of the participants. This shift can be observed as well in both the MoK approach and the MAG Method.

In addition to finding and practicing new ways of doing research that are more power-sensitive, reflexivity is a central feature of feminist research. Reid defines it as being about “reflecting on power; a researcher’s power to perceive, interpret, and communicate about Others” (2004, p.7). This is directly connected to Haraway’s (1988) critique of the ‘god trick’ and Harding’s (1993) assertion that the researcher is not neutral but speaks from a certain standpoint, showing that knowledge is socially situated. The researcher is not a modest witness anymore, observing from a distance to reach objectivity, but is placed on “the same critical causal plane as the objects of knowledge” (Harding, 1993, p.69). According to Harding, it is only through the recognition and reflection on one’s own position, attitudes and values that a ‘strong objectivity’ can be reached. It is through self-reflexivity that a researcher can become more objective. The MAG Method addresses the power relations between the researchers and the other participants, but there is little explicit reflection on the position,

values and attitudes of the researcher guiding the process. This is definitely an area in which the MAG Method has a lot to gain from looking at feminist epistemology. While I observed a very strong reflexivity of the different participants in the MoK Approach, feminist epistemology can enrich it as well, opening it up to considerations of gender, race or sexuality, because its main focus is on class as an axis of oppression. Taking an intersectional approach that takes into account how the experience of poverty can vary according to these other axes of oppression, will render the analysis more complex and more inclusive.

It appears thus that feminist approaches to doing research and their considerations of power relations align themselves very well with participatory research practices, as they share a common objective of challenging traditional power relations within research. However, even though feminists usually applaud participatory research methods when they are power sensitive and inclusive, most feminists tend to avoid them in their own practice of doing research. Cancian notes that within feminist research, “few studies adopt the more radical methods of including an action component, using strong participatory methods that give participants substantial control over and involvement in the study, and critiquing the power relations in academia” (1992, p.629). Even if this statement was made over twenty years ago, it still largely holds true. Even if the early 2000s have seen a development of feminist participatory action research, it is still under-developed and used by a limited amount of researchers (Reid, 2004). This is where feminist research can gain from adopting or inspiring itself from participatory methods such as the MoK approach and the MAG Method. These methods can give extra tools and ways of doing in order to carry out research in the most power sensitive, inclusive and participative way. Of course, doing participatory research, especially with a feminist angle, takes time, energy and the involvement of significant amount of people over a significant period. Furthermore, as Reid (2004) and Cancian (1992) point out, and as will be further demonstrated in the last section of this chapter, participatory research is still very marginal in academia, and researchers are under a lot of pressure to publish frequently. Adopting university-approved methods is more likely to further their career, as they will be more recognized and cited more. I do believe that researchers have an important role in challenging this economy of knowledge. In her cosmopolitical proposal, Stengers argues for a slowing down and a “putting into equality” (2005, p.1003), in which “equality does not mean that they all have the same say in the matter but that they all have to be present in the mode that makes the decision as difficult as possible” (2005, p.1003). Research should thus make it as difficult as possible, in the sense that as much time and

means as possible should be deployed in order to allow for an in depth participation of all those involved in the research process. This includes involving as many stakeholders as possible, including as much as possible to the most excluded and favoring as much as possible an equal participation of all.

### **From theory to practice: dealing with power relations**

As I observed through my interviews about the EQUIhealThY project and the application of the MAG method at l'ilot, one of the most difficult things when doing participatory research is to clearly establish and define the role of the researcher. Both methods challenge the power that researchers usually have and advocate reciprocity. The main question is however to what extent the power of the researcher should be limited. In the carrying out of the MAG at l'ilot, it appears that the researchers mainly took the role of facilitators. As the participants pointed out, their main role was to make sure the method was followed properly, and they didn't add much in terms of content, as the analysis they produced was more a structured compilation of the different interventions that had been made. The researcher I interviewed said that he limited his role to the putting in place of the method, and that he took a position of "benevolence and neutrality" (researcher MAG, 2016, translation mine). Interestingly, Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen argue in their book about the MAG Method that the researcher should also bring in a "theoretical contribution" (2005, p.167, translation mine) to the analysis allowing for an exchange between participants and the researcher.

The role and the power of the researchers and the two volunteers of ATD Fourth World who participated in the EQUIhealThY project was also widely discussed in the interviews and exchanges led by Marion Carrel and in my own interviews. In their interview with Marion Carrel, the researchers expressed that they sometimes felt that there was an "overprotection of the people" (Carrel, 2016a, translation mine) and that they sometimes felt manipulated, as they couldn't access what had been said in the peer group of people living in poverty, only the final conclusions arising from their discussions were shared. In addition to this, they said that they censored themselves during the project, fearing to influence the process and thus were not able to share their knowledge and their take on the subject at hand. In addition to this, the academic institutions, which had to recognize the validity of the knowledge produced, don't encourage the sharing of power between academic researchers and other co-researchers, and tend to put researchers under a lot of pressure (Reid, 2004). One of the researchers pointed out

that the stakes were very high for her, as she was at the beginning of her career and needed the recognition. The case studies thus show that both participatory research practices successfully challenge the power of the researcher, but also raise questions as to what extent it should be. While reciprocity is seen as essential in both the Mok approach and the MAG Method, it seems difficult to put in place. As Harding (2004) argues, starting from marginal lives allows us to ask new questions and challenge dominant knowledge claims, and this was the objective of the EQUiheaThY project. She however also argues that this does not mean that the oppressed have a unique ability to produce knowledge.

When talking about objectivity and tools to deconstruct what she calls ‘hostile science’ and its claims for absolute truth and objectivity, Haraway argues that we “need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different – and power differentiated – communities” (1988, p.580). I argue that the strength of both the MAG method and the MoK approach lays in the potential they have to create connections within the knowledge-building process between very different people and very different communities. The main difficulty then, as shown in the previous paragraph, is to find a balance in terms of power relations, to make sure everyone can contribute while starting from the standpoint of the most oppressed. The main ingredient for finding this balance according to me is through Harding’s “strong reflexivity” (1993, p.69). On the one hand, strong reflexivity means that the social, historical and cultural location of those producing knowledge is considered and the assumptions and beliefs they carry because of this. Harding argues that a critical inquiry of the standpoint of scientists and researchers is best achieved from the perspective of those whom they have historically marginalized. She argues that “strong objectivity requires that scientists and their communities be integrated into democracy-advancing projects for scientific and epistemological reasons as well as moral and political ones” (1993, p.69). I would argue in addition to the integration of scientists in democracy-advancing projects, there should be a democratization of knowledge production itself, integrating marginalized people and communities. Reflexivity is also about taking up issues of power and authority and our positionality within the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Attention should thus be paid to power relations throughout the research process, in addition to being aware of the location from which each participant speaks. I would argue that the researcher should not become invisible or a simple enabler as this was arguably the case in the two projects of research I studied. An exchange should take place between the different participants, including the researcher. Because of their different locations and standpoints a

strong reflexivity should however be practiced throughout and even after the research process, in order to balance power relations.

Here again, time is a very important factor when it comes to achieve this. I observed that in the EQUihealthY project, reflexivity was practiced more and there was a greater awareness of power relations, compared to the project at l'ilot where the MAG Method was used. I concluded this because in the EQUihealthY project, the differences in abilities and social positions were made explicit, and strategies to challenge existing power relations were put in place, such as the peer groups, and a cautiousness or “overprotection of the people” (Carrel, 2016a, translation mine) by the two volunteers of ATD Fourth World. Furthermore, the different parties took time once the project was finished to get back together and evaluate the research process, notably discussing power relations and issues of participation. The MAG Method, on the other hand, assumes the equal ability of participants to participate in the knowledge production process, as long as the method is applied properly (van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005, p.44, translation mine). This means that at l'ilot, the method was applied, and the analysis was made without an explicit consideration of the location and standpoint of the different participants or the power relations that were at play. Part of this difference in reflexivity can be explained by the different approaches the methods take, I would argue however that the length of both processes plays a central role as well when it comes to reflexivity and dealing with power relations. When talking with one of the volunteers of ATD Fourth World and the power she had in her role as ‘bridge’ between the researchers and the peer group of people living in poverty, she underlined the importance of working with people in the long run, and argued that time was an essential factor to be certain that she didn't have a power over the group of people living in poverty (volunteer 1, 2016). As she argued, taking time to really know each other and build a trusting relationship has prevented her from misinterpreting their thoughts or “make them say things” (volunteer 1, 2016). While I would argue that power relations cannot be completely avoided, I would agree that time is crucial in a participatory research process if one wants to produce knowledge that is truly inclusive. As the nurse involved in the EQUihealthY project commented on my document with interpretations and conclusions:

When you say that merging knowledge takes time if we want everyone to contribute, I would add that this time should also be sufficient in order for the participants to really get to know each other, to understand each other (through our different experiences) and mostly to develop a trusting relationship. (Nurse, 2016, translation mine)



Creating these connections and relationships takes time, but are vital for a mutual understanding and mutual trust, which are essential ingredients for the production of a knowledge that is collective and inclusive.

Looking at power relations in the EQUIhealthy project, which used the MoK approach, and the project at l'ilot, where the MAG Method was used shows us that dealing with power relations is complex, and that a medium has to be found between challenging the power of the researchers and not reducing them to silence. I argue that Harding's 'strong reflexivity' is a good place to start in order to find that balance, recognizing and critically engaging with the position from which each participant speaks. Furthermore, it became clear during the interviews that here again, time is crucial when dealing with power relations, as they become less strong the more participants know and understand each other by reaching a common language and a mutual relationship of trust.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Empowerment and involvement of the most oppressed in knowledge production**

#### **Merging of Knowledge on empowerment and social change**

What is particularly interesting about the MoK approach is that it was developed by ATD Fourth World, a nonprofit and activist organization, and thus originated from civil society rather than academia. This is important, because while research in academia is not necessarily committed to bring about social change, the MoK approach is strongly committed to it, with as ultimate objective to participate in the eradication of extreme poverty around the world (Fourth World University Research Group, 2007). On the one hand, it aims to influence policies and practices with the inclusive knowledge that is produced, and on the other, its objective is to empower its participants and create new social relations that would not necessarily have existed otherwise.

Knowledge as such can bring about social change, by revealing new ways of doing, thinking, and seeing the world. As de Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon argue, the ultimate purpose of the MoK approach is to bring about "social change towards greater justice, through merging the knowledge of all sides" (2014, p.91, translation mine). The main idea is that including the knowledge of people in situation of poverty is essential to

successfully fight against poverty and exclusion. As is argued in the Guidelines for doing MoK, the “failure to take into account the knowledge of people living in poverty is one of the reasons for the failure of anti-poverty programs” (ATD Fourth World, 2006). The MoK approach thus rests on the conviction that people living in poverty know better than anyone else what a just society would look like and how to get there without forgetting the most marginalized and excluded (de Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon, 2014). This resonates very strongly with Harding’s early writings on standpoint epistemology, in which she argues that “the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse” (1991, p.120), and that the standpoint of women, because of their oppressed status, is less partial and distorted. The MoK approach does not imply a hierarchy of standpoints however; its objective is rather to put different standpoints on an equal footing in order to merge the different knowledges deriving from them. This does imply that the standpoint of people living in a situation of poverty is underlined and given more space, in order to balance out the unequal recognition and influence of the different standpoints within research and in public policies.

It is not only through the knowledge produced that the MoK approach tries to bring about social change and inform practices. The whole process of merging knowledge is an attempt in itself at changing the way research is done, creating new social bonds and bringing about a change in the attitudes, points of view and practices of the different participants, which empowers them to make a difference. The MoK approach is defined as a “process of mutual learning” (Fourth World-University Research Group, 2007, p.ix) and a “mutual co-training” (de Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon, 2014, p.90, translation mine), in which each and every one learns something from the other. By making the link between different people from different social spheres and fostering a mutual understanding and a co-construction of knowledge, the objective is that the participants change the way they relate to each other and adapt their practices in order to take into account the standpoint of the other participants. As I will show in the last part of the chapter, the EQUiheaLThY project had a big impact on the practices of the health professionals, people in situation of poverty and researchers that participated, giving them more confidence talking to their doctor, changing their research practices or having a better understanding of their patients.

Furthermore, de Laat, Boyer, Hudon, Goulet and Loignon argue that the recognition of the contribution that people living in poverty can make to the production of knowledge has an

empowering effect. Here, empowerment is defined as the “development of the power to act” (2014, p.73, translation mine). Indeed, they argue that through the MoK approach, people living in poverty gain confidence in themselves and in their abilities, which empowers them to change their practices and act upon unjust situations with which they are confronted. The MoK approach is, however, not a magic recipe to empowerment, for there is a lot of work that precedes and follows it. It is here important to note that the people in poverty that have participated so far in research with this approach were already involved with ATD Fourth World for a while. They were already part of the ‘Fourth World People’s University’ where they could meet, discuss and share their ideas with others (ATD Fourth World, 2016) and came a long way in terms of empowerment.

Merging of Knowledge is thus not only about ‘giving a voice’ to people in situation of poverty; it is about rethinking the way research is done, the way we relate to each other, and giving the time and space necessary to allow people in situation of poverty to become actors both in the research process and within society through actively contributing to it.

### **The MAG Method on empowerment and social change**

Contrarily to the MoK approach, the MAG Method has been developed in an academic context. It was thus not as action-oriented at its origin, its primary objective was not being emancipation or empowerment of the oppressed. It is, however, not a neutral method, as it changes the relation between researcher and object of research, and includes the elaboration of “practical perspectives”, which are a set of suggestion about how to solve the problem analyzed in practice (Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005), in order to translate the analysis made into action. It thus has a strong action component to it and can be used as an instrument for social change. Whether this social change works in favor of the most oppressed or reinforces current power dynamics is another question. Because fighting oppression is not its primary purpose, the effects of the MAG Method will significantly depend on the objective pursued, who carries it out for whom, and who is invited to sit at the table. As Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen (2005) argue, it is a hybrid, both inspired by revolutionary and emancipatory approaches within research, such as Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and a more utilitarian way of doing sociology, responding to the needs of the client.

It is however still an interesting method to consider when doing feminist research. It can be a very effective method to bring about change with limited resources, with the condition that the most oppressed and most excluded in terms of knowledge production are part of it, that a space is created in which they can express themselves, and that there is a strong reflexivity in terms of the power relations at play. This is of course not easily met, and feminist literature on power, intersectionality, empowerment and safe spaces can be very useful to this purpose. The method is however a good foundation to build upon for two reasons. Firstly, because it is “radically democratic” (Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005, p.186, translation mine) one of its central aims being the democratization of the knowledge production process. This value is found back in the structure of the MAG method itself, with speaking turns and a very strong accountability of the researchers towards the other participants. This democratization of the knowledge-production process is what feminist research should aim for in order to produce knowledges that are more inclusive and to take into account the standpoint of the most oppressed.

The second reason why the MAG Method is a good foundation to build upon for feminist researchers is that it creates new social relations and transforms existing ones. According to Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, the objective of the method is “to contribute to a better comprehension of the world and to a transformation of the social relations in which the different actors deploy their practices” (2005, p.181, translation mine). By putting together the different stakeholders to think about a social problem and explore possible solutions, it hopes to create new social relations, making everyone aware of the standpoint of the other. The method has then a transformative impact on the participants themselves, and “does not leave them unscathed” (Van Campenhoudt, Chaumont and Franssen, 2005, p.180, translation mine). Their point of view shifts, and often allows for a more complex understanding of the situation, which then hopefully translates into a change in practices. The case study of l’ilot shows however that this is not easily achieved in practice. The method in itself has a limited impact and a follow up that is more long terms is necessary for a greater impact.

### **Feminist research, empowerment and social change**

Empowerment and social change are more often than not the direct or indirect objective of feminist research. As Lather points out at the end of the 1980s, a very significant and increasing part of feminist empirical research operated according to a “critical, praxis-

oriented paradigm concerned with both producing emancipatory knowledge and empowering the researched” (1988, p.570). Similarly to Lather, Sherry Gorelick (1991) showed through her literature review that there was a rising consensus that feminist research could not solely be describing women’s oppression but had to challenge it too. Generally speaking, another similarity between feminist research and participatory research is thus that they both aim at being transformative, rethinking the way in which knowledge is produced, by whom and for whom, in order to challenge the power structures in place. Feminist standpoint epistemology in particular has these objectives at its core. As Harding (1991) argued, knowledge emerges from the struggle against oppression, and hence feminist politics are a necessary companion for feminist research. Abigail Brooks (2007) further argues that standpoint epistemology is explicitly founded on the goal of giving voice to women who have been silenced and ignored, build knowledge starting from their experience, and bring about women-centered solidarity and social change. According to her, it is about “building knowledge and empowerment through women’s lived experiences” (Brooks, 2007, p.53). This resonates very strongly with the MoK approach, where instead of aiming for social change and empowerment through building on women’s experience, the experience of people in situation of poverty is taken as starting point. The approach and objectives remain however the same, they are just applied to a different category, along the lines of class rather than gender. This observation was made by Harding (1991) as well, who acknowledged the parallel between feminist standpoint theory and the ‘standpoint of the proletariat’ present in Marxist discussions. Just like Harding, when she says that “everything that feminist thought must know must also inform the thought of every other liberatory movement, and vice versa” (1993, p.67), I think both approaches should complement each other and be put in conversation to achieve knowledge, empowerment and social change that is as inclusive as possible.

The MAG method does not focus on a particular group along a specific axis of oppression, but it does aim at building knowledge that induces action and brings about social change starting from the experience of a diverse group of people. This carries the risk that the standpoints of the most oppressed get neglected or simply not included in the steps toward social change that are taken. However, this risk is attenuated if an intersectional approach informed by feminist standpoint theory is taken. As Harding (1993) argues, to start from women’s lives, and I would say this is true when starting from any oppressed group’s lives, we have to consider multiple, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting lives. According to her, the subject and agent of feminist knowledge, and I would add of any subjugated

knowledge, are multiple. Furthermore, she contends that the ability to produce this kind of knowledge is not unique to people identifying with the particular oppressed group, and that others can produce this kind of knowledge as long as they start from the experience of the oppressed, and I would argue, include them in the research process. If the MAG is practiced following this line of thought, I believe that bringing together the different stakeholders to think about a specific social problem can be extremely productive when it comes to bringing about social change that benefits the most oppressed.

While empowerment remains a vague and contested term, Summerson Carr, looking at it through a feminist lens, defines it as an “inherently interpersonal process in which individuals collectively define and activate strategies to gain access to knowledge and power” (2003, p.18). According to her, this ‘conscientization process’ takes place through collective identity-building and producing one’s own interpretation of the world, and can lead to social and political mobilization to bring about change. The centrality of self-determination (Sprague and Hayes, 2000), and self-definition (Collins, 1991), arising from the multiple relationships with people who share one’s struggle has been identified as key to individual and collective empowerment by several feminist theorists. This search for self-determination through a collective process can be found back in the MoK approach, with the constitution of peer group specifically for that purpose.

The importance of creating empowering interpersonal and social structural relationships is underlined by Sprague and Hayes (2000). They argue that new interaction strategies need to be found and that one has to start from the standpoint of the most oppressed to be able to understand and change the way in which social structures and the relationships it creates “facilitates the self-determination of the privileged, often at the expense of the most vulnerable members of the community” (2000, p.690). In a similar vein, Lather (1988) argues as well that the reciprocally educative process is more important than the final product of research when it comes to empowerment. The empowering potential of both the MAG method and the MoK approach is thus that they create new relationships, often bringing people together that wouldn’t have met otherwise, and that they explore new ways of interacting with one another.

### **From Theory to Practice: Empowerment and social change**

Before looking at the impact of the EQUihealthY project and the MAG at l’ilot in terms of empowerment and social change, it is important to ask whose empowerment we are

talking about and what social change for whom. I would like to argue that both the MAG Method and the MoK approach would have a lot to gain from integrating an intersectional approach, for different reasons. As shown earlier on in this thesis, the MoK approach identifies three types of knowledge along the axis of class: the knowledge of people living in poverty, the knowledge of people working with people in poverty and the knowledge of academics. While the method requires cuts along a specific axis of oppression in order to be able to form peer groups, it is important to remember to recognize the heterogeneity of people living in poverty and that people's experiences can be defined by the intersection of different axis of oppression, meaning that poverty will not be experienced in the same way by all. The question of identity and difference has been discussed at length in intersectional theory and feminist standpoint theory. As Harding points out, "the subject/agent of feminist knowledge is multiple, heterogeneous and frequently contradictory" (1993, p.65), because in addition to gender, there is a whole host of other axis of oppression, such as sexuality or race that have an impact on someone's experiences and standpoint. Lorde (1984) addresses the heterogeneity of the category 'woman', and argues for the need to recognize difference while relating within equality, and use it to enrich the joint struggle against women's oppression. In my exchanges with a member of the pedagogical team in the EQUIhealThY project, I learned that for the recruitment of the people living in poverty, identity was a central criterion. One of the conditions was that they identify as a person living in poverty, the objective being that they speak from that position. Intersectional theory makes clear however that the different systems of oppression are interlocking, and that one cannot be seen in isolation of the other. Crenshaw (1989) exemplified this by showing the multidimensionality of Black women's experience in the United-States, as they face oppression both because of race and because of gender, making their experience of sexism different from that of white women and their experience of racism different from that of Black men. In the project at l'ilot, identity was a lot less central, and only relevant to designate the position of each participant in the structure of l'ilot. Recognizing and integrating the different axis of oppression and the way they intersect is important when it comes to producing knowledge that is inclusive and working towards social change that benefits the most oppressed. Without an intersectional approach, and thus considerations of gender, race and ethnicity in the perceived barriers for healthcare that were investigated in the EQUIhealthy project it is likely that the experience of some people living in poverty in Quebec, such as immigrants or people part of the LGBT+ community fell between the cracks of the analysis. While means were limited and that having an absolutely representative group of all those living in poverty in Quebec is not possible, there should be

an awareness of intersecting oppressions and an explicit statement of whose knowledge we are talking about, social change for whom and who might not be represented.

It became clear to me through the interviews that the MoK approach and the MAG Method tend to have different results in terms of impact. While the evaluation of the EQUiheaThY project revealed a general feeling of empowerment, this did not appear at all during my interviews with the participants of the project at l'ilot. On the other hand, the latter, showed more potential in terms of structural change of the functioning of the organisation, while the participants in the EQUihealthy project concluded that very little structural change had taken place after their research. As volunteer 2 pointed out to me upon reading my interpretations, merging knowledge is not only about making sure people living in poverty contribute to the knowledge produced but also about learning from each other. As participant 1 pointed out during the skype with the different parties involved and led by Marion Carrel, “everyone has evolved. It brought us something. It might not have changed the world, but we reached individuals” (Carrel, 2016b, translation mine). The skype ended with volunteer 2 concluding that it was not only about the empowerment of the poorest, it is about empowering each and every one to bring about change, about “emancipating together” (volunteer 2, 2016, translation mine). Indeed in their individual interviews with Marion Carrel all participants reported having learnt a lot and that the project had changed their practices. While participant 2 said she now was able to engage more with her doctor, the nurse explained how she now dared to renegotiate a decision that a doctor might have taken. The researchers as well noted that it had had an impact in the way they practice their job. During my interviews with the participants in the MAG Method at l'ilot, they all said that it had not changed their practices, and reported not having learnt much. What most of them did say was that they learned about the diverging practices of the different employees of the organization. This difference in impact on individuals can on the one hand be explained by the differing time frame and intensity of the project, but also by different objectives. While the MoK approach focuses a lot on the participation of the most excluded and mutual learning, the MAG Method focuses more on the transformation of organizational structures.

In terms of structural change, the EQUiheaThY project seems to have had little impact. As participant 1 noted, a transformation of people took place, but not really of structures. While the researchers argued that the transformation of the healthcare system was not the main objective of the research, the people living in poverty expressed a very strong desire for their research not ending up “on the shelf” (participant 2, 2016, translation mine)



and that nothing would be done with it. This tension in expectations and objectives shows the importance of clear agreements not only on the research method, but also on the objectives of the research and what will be done with it afterwards. The project at l'ilot, where the MAG Method was applied, the main objective was to rethink the practices of l'ilot and the place of its clients in the structure. While my interviews took place at the beginning of the project, it could already be observed that there was a potential for structural change within l'ilot, as the direction was the party that initiated the project and showed a willingness to rethink its structures. This need for the involvement of more powerful and influential parties was discussed in the EQUihealthY project as well. The nurse involved said that if it had to be done again, she would ask for a strong involvement of a doctor, arguing that she didn't have enough weight on her own to bring about change in the institution she works at (Carrel, 2016a). At the same time, one of the volunteers pointed out that one has to be careful when including hierarchical superiors in the MoK process, as there is a danger that they could silence others (Carrel, 2016b). Involving influential people in such research process should thus be treated with caution, and the decision on extent to which they participate should be made in function of the objectives of the research project, notably whether the focus is on individual empowerment, or structural change.

## **Conclusion**

The way one decides to do research is important, as it determines what knowledge will be produced, and what impact it can have on individuals and social structures. In this thesis I have shown how feminist standpoint epistemology and two participatory research methods, the Merging of Knowledge approach and the MAG Method, share the idea that knowledge is socially situated, and have the objective of challenging power relations within research and bringing about social change in favour of the most oppressed. In order to do so, they recommend and use different strategies. While feminist standpoint epistemology argues for a strong reflexivity, starting the knowledge building process from the standpoint of the most oppressed and adopting an intersectional approach, the MAG Method focuses on constituting a representative group of participants, monitoring speaking times and speaking turns in order to create an 'artificial equality', and a validation of the researcher's analysis by the participants. The MoK approach in turn insists on going at the pace of the slowest, bridging the reality of people living in poverty and the reality of academics and practitioners through a pedagogical team, finding a common language and reciprocity.

The interviews and analysis of my two case studies, the EQUIhealThY project and the project at l'ilot, allowed me to get a view of how these different strategies play out in practice. It became clear that the length of the research process is crucial when it comes to reaching in depth participation of all, dealing with power relations and in terms of empowerment and social change. Doing participatory research in a power-aware and inclusive way takes time. I observed as well the importance of creating a space for emotions and working through them. Furthermore, collective knowledge can only be reached when a true confrontation of different standpoints takes place. In terms of power relations, it appeared that while both methods aimed for a relation of reciprocity and shared power between the academics and the other participants, this is very difficult to achieve. Practicing strong reflexivity is then essential to try and achieve as much as possible a balance between the existing power relations. Finally, when it comes to empowerment and social change, I underlined the importance of taking an intersectional approach in order to make sure that those facing multiple oppressions don't fall between the cracks and benefit from it as well. I noted as well the importance of having influential people amongst the participants if the objective is to transform structures, with the risk that power relations are more difficult to balance. These participatory methods, especially the MoK approach have however a very strong potential when it comes to individual empowerment of all those involved in the research process.

Doing participatory research is not easy. As a researcher it means partly losing control over the research process, depending more on others for the success of one's project and using more time and resources. With this thesis I however hope to have shown the potential that this strand of research has for feminist research in addition to having encouraged the integration of feminist principles into these participatory research practices.

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