

Addressing Socio-cultural Animation as Community Based Social Work with street children in Maputo, Mozambique

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It is rare to find a book written in English focused on the study of socio-cultural animation that is not the product of a translation from French, Spanish or Portuguese. Socio-cultural animation is a methodology for social and educational intervention that was originated in the middle of the 50's of the last century in France and soon spread to the French-speaking countries and Spain, and through the latter, to Hispanic and Lusitanian countries. It can be said that there is not in the academic tradition or practice of the Anglo-Saxon countries anything like socio-cultural animation. Currently, a Google search of the terms "socio-cultural animation" generates very little results. Community Development would be the closest Anglo-Saxon equivalent. The author himself, when expresses his initial expectations regarding his research, notes that... *the findings of the study may promote reflection on issues related to community development and social work practices* (p. 33).

There are few countries in which both terms and methodologies (community development and socio-cultural animation) have been used simultaneously. Probably, Canada and Finland are the most representative cases. In the first case, this is explained by the bilingualism (French/English) and multiculturalism in that country. In the second case, this is due to the influence of professor Leena Kurki who, in the mid 90's of the last century, introduced in Finland ideas and practices concerning socio-cultural animation that were being developed in southern Europe.

This is the context of Professor Marrengula's book. It is the result of a doctoral thesis supervised by L. Kurki and T. Pösö and presented at the University of Tampere (Finland) in 2010. From my point of view, this fact marks the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the book. Among the former, I can include the need and relevance of the issues at stake, the rigor and depth in the treatment of content, and finally, the involvement of the researcher and his knowledge of the territorial context and of the methodological and disciplinary issues. Among the weaknesses, I include the fact of having a classical structure, which is more appropriate for a research report than for a book. Also I include among the weaknesses of the book, the abundance of quotations and references that at times can make reading a bit dense.

It should be noted that, despite all, the book is written and constructed in a very didactic way, which facilitates the reading and the location of the reader throughout the text. Each chapter begins with a brief enumeration of the points that will be addressed and ends with a summary of the main contributions.

The book is organized into nine chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the presentation of the study. The next three chapters form the theoretical framework. They address the problem of street children, the way this problem is defined and its contextualization in the city of Maputo, Mozambique. The author also discusses the theoretical and methodological settings of socio-cultural animation and poses it as Participatory Action Research.

The fifth and sixth chapters focus on research methodology and the results of it. The last three chapters, by way of conclusion, focus on the main contributions of this study: (a) participation and social change in the lives of street children; (b) the factors that push or attract (pull) children to live on the street in the analysed context and how those factors relate to the rights of children, and finally, (c) the strengths and limitations of the socio-cultural animation methodology used for the study of street children.

I have to say that the book has interested me much, first, because of my own dedication to socio-cultural animation as a methodology for social and educational intervention. Second, because the way the author presents the study and his involvement in the issue of street children. As he explains, his commitment to this issue comes from his own biography, which made him experience first-hand that reality.

Throughout the text, the author intersperses small reflections or stories relating to his biography and his experiences, first as a person and then as a student facing the challenge of developing a doctoral thesis. I find some of them particularly interesting, since they show the problems often faced by social scientists that have to work in the community context and in the context of people's daily life and the work of professionals and of institutions. The dedication of those and these to the research project requires effort and extra time, making it difficult to negotiate on the part of the researcher. This is problematic even though they are all aware that the research in which they are asked to participate may make improvements in community life or impact on the social inclusion of some of its members, as was the case in this research.

I think it should be noted, too, the relevance of approaching the issue of street children and overcoming the problems of socio-cultural animation's methodology.

The author wonders how it is possible that there are so many NGOs working in Maputo with street children and they do not get more results. He answers by noting that if the actions of these organizations fail is because they do not have the participation of street children themselves. This is the axis around which he constructs all his work and that is also what leads him to think about the use of socio-cultural animation as a theoretical and methodological approach appropriate to deal with these children.

In the same way, what he wants to know is whether a methodology such as socio-cultural animation can generate results in social work practice with street children in Mozambique. But to do that he needed to reconstruct the academic and practical discourse on socio-cultural animation, which he carried out based on the works of

French, Spanish, and Brazilian authors. Gillet and Freire are the authors on which he constructed the theoretical proposal that informed and guided the fieldwork.

However, I must say that socio-cultural animation is a set of methodological principles rather than a concrete and precise methodology. In fact, there is no specific methodology that can be identified as the methodology of socio-cultural animation, instead it can be updated through a variety of ways and be applied with very different techniques. This leads the author to pose socio-cultural animation as a participatory action research and also to differentiate it from other approaches like, for example, ethnography. What distinguishes socio-cultural animation is that in addition to be a description or an interpretation, it is also a social and educational intervention that works **with** street children and not **on** or **for** them. This is clearly reflected in the results obtained by Marrengula's research, which shows 6 stories of street children who could be reintegrated into their families based on the demands and proposals that they made during the process of participatory action-research.

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