

# **Action Research and Psychosocial Intervention in Community: analysis of articles published from 2000 to 2011 and categories of reading of the methodologies of intervention in community**

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## *Abstract*

The article examines the area of the psychological intervention in community. The study is based on the articles published in the last 12 years in specialized journals, defining the field of enquiry in two methodologies of intervention: the action research and the psychosocial intervention. The study proposes some psycho-clinic reading categories of the reports of experiences, together with a synthesis of the historic-epistemological context in which those methodologies are placed in. The analysis of data allows to highlight the variables that organise the distribution of published articles; during the discussion of the results are proposed hypotheses on types of intervention and on representations of community that most characterize this context, along with a reading of the historical period that the models of intervention in community are going through.

*Keywords:* action-research, psychosocial intervention, community.

## *Introduction*

This research has as object of study the methodology of psychological intervention in the community.

The basic idea of the study is to investigate how psychological interventions are conducted in broader social contexts, such as cities, neighborhoods, villages, suburbs, everything that falls under contexts not limited to institutional and organizational defined boundaries. For this kind of psychological operations, the word most commonly used in field studies is "community." This article offers a review of articles published internationally in the last 12 years in journals of Psychology concerning this type of intervention.

The difficulties to deal with this kind of study were plenty. We hope the research can point out the concepts of "intervention" and "community" and the different meanings they assume depending on the specific psychological approach that the authors adopt. Today it doesn't exist a single theoretical corpus to use as a model of orientation and to which tense research efforts.

There are several approaches, or Schools that deal to intervention in community. The variety of scientific membership that deal with intervention in community could orientate the research in studying everyone of these, in order to formulate the hypothesis on the different representations of "intervention" and "community".

This research strategy assumes that from theoretical models may have interventions consistent with the methodological premises. In the early phase of the work we adopted the following research strategy<sup>1</sup>.

As we continued the work, we had further complications: in the internal limits of a School or psychological belonging (Community Psychology, Health Psychology, Environmental Psychology,

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed the work pursues and deepens a research that constituted the object of the graduation thesis in "Clinical and Dynamic Psychology for person, organization and community", in the Faculty of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome. In that occasion, the study of international literature, concerning the intervention in community, constituted part of the report of a wider project, related to a research-intervention in San Lorenzo, a quarter of Rome.

Constructivist Psychology, etc.) often the use of the meanings and of the historical references<sup>2</sup>, underlying the "intervention in community", were not univocal. From our studying we found out that the psychological belonging declared in the articles could not distinguish a sufficiently homogeneous praxis of intervention for the professionals related to the same School, nor sometimes coherent to the theoretical premises of the model itself. The variable "psychological belonging" was therefore reconsidered and proposed as one of the criteria classification of articles; analysis of the results will allow us to make assumptions about general trends of Schools belonging in relation to the type of intervention and the representations of communities in which it operates. These are the two fundamental dimensions of organization of publications and formulation of reading hypotheses: 1) methodologies of intervention 2) conceptions of community. An important specification: in this review we have used articles that present a report of the experiences of intervention in community, appeared in the literature in the last 12 years (2000-2011); the theoretical studies that don't present a report of an intervention were anyway selected and used as a support to set-up the categories of analysis of detected reports.

The starting source of orientation to the literature research was the article of 2002 (trad. it. 2005) by Dubost & Levy, "Action-Research and Intervention". The authors propose a wide and articulate examination of the historical evolution of intervention in community, querying about some tenets of the Action/Research and the Psychosociological Intervention, searching analogies and relations in the course of XX century. We started with the purpose to set-up some general hypothesis about the cultures of Schools that have characterized this methodology of intervention. In these circumstances we propose a synthesis of this examination, in order to underline some historical and methodological specificities, useful to the comprehension of the current tenets of intervention.

### *Sample*

We used the database PsychINFO. The field of research is delimited to the last 12 years, from 2000 to 2011. In order to obtain richer data for the specific field of investigation – psychological intervention in community – were chosen two different conditions, both used in specialised studies: a) Action Research; b) Psychosocial Intervention.

The keywords used for the research were: a) Action/Research AND Community (ARC); b) Psychosocial Intervention OR Psychosocial Interventions AND Community (PIC), delimiting both the enquiries to the Title.

Regarding the research in ARC, the articles appeared in the database are 88; among these ones, the articles available to fit in the sample were 51. All the articles available in literature<sup>3</sup> are 99, the first one appeared in 1987.

Regarding the research in PIC, the articles appeared in the database are 11; among these ones, the articles available to fit in the sample are 7. Among these seven, two are counted two times because they present two reports in relation to different experiences, therefore the final sample is constituted by 9 reports. All the articles present in the literature are 15, the first one appeared in 1992.

### *Coding Criteria*

The articles that are reports of experiences are numbered and signed.

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<sup>2</sup> The published articles, proposing the report of an experience starting from the same methodologies – action research and psychosocial intervention – refer to Authors belonging to different times and scientific affiliations.

<sup>3</sup> Without considering the period that we analyse: 2000-2011.

It is considered the year of publication of the article (criterion I) and the country where the intervention took place (criterion II), highlighting also the case in which the authors have a different nationality related to it.

It is considered the professional identity or membership of School (criterion III). Making the classification of this third criterion, considering the theoretical and methodological references that are declared in the articles, the priority was given to the general School rather than to the specific approaches issued from the first one. For example, the "Rural Social Work" is classified as "Community Psychology"; "Wellbeing Psychology", "Disability Psychology" and "Positive Psychology"<sup>4</sup> were classified as "Health Psychology".

The methodological premises, the purpose of work and the actual proposals for action that each article proposes, lead to the "operational definition of intervention" (criterion IV).

The different ways of intervention are thought in relation to the different ways of conceiving the area, or organization, where the work is carried out; the different "representations of community", supposable from the reading of reports, constitute the last coding criterion (criterion V).

*Operational definitions of intervention and representations of community: two criteria transmitting psycho-clinic reading categories*

The IV and V reading criteria propose some analysis categories that are not directly declared in the articles, but inferred from those. They represent the outcome of the analysis of reports, for which we referred to categories of readings submitted by a specific clinical psychology theory, Analysis of the Demand (Carli & Panicia, 2003). The theoretical-methodological principles of the Analysis of Demand were used at first as guides in the reading of reports and after for the construction of categories with a sufficiently homogeneous representational function and mutually exclusive logic; the intention of this article is to present these categories as useful reading criteria of the methodology of intervention (IV) and of the community (V).

The clinical psychological dimension to which we referred in the analysis of reports and in the synthesis of reading criteria were:

- Social mandate and commission. Social mandate is the process of legitimation and of consensus that is socially recognized to a profession; the social mandate allows the recognition of a profession for his general propositions. The commission is inherent to the expectations and the objectives that a person (organization, community) has when addresses to a psychologist; the commission contextualises the general propositions of the social mandate, turning them into operative dimensions of relation.
- Identified problem and relation with the context. It's taken in consideration: the reading categories proposed in articles in which are understood/interpreted/thought the problems of a community; the theoretical and social dimensions that the articles propose for a reading of the context; the relation between social problems and context in which those rose up.
- Work competencies and methodological references. The way the psychologist structures his relation with the client, the operative tools proposed.
- Objective of the intervention. The theoretical and social dimensions that the interventions seek to pursue.

We choose to focus the study on reports, considering them the preferential tool of psychology in relation to the verification of work, the understanding of categories of reading of the events transmitted by the authors (Carli & Panicia, 2005), the relation between theory and praxis of intervention (Circolo del Cedro, 1992) and the carried out logics of the communicative process (Sesto, 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> For each of these "subschoools" only one article is available in the sample we took in consideration for this work.

*Operative definitions of intervention:*

- Development of Symbolic Dimensions: object of the intervention is the social meanings shared from a community. The psychological theories that professionals use to orientate themselves, are useful to understand these meanings, allowing the symbolic and historic comprehension. The professionals involved in the relationship between them and the community, use this rapport as a basis for understanding the meanings concerning the coexistence. The work on cultural dimensions is thought as a process capable to promote the development of alternative dimensions of civic society.

The methodology uses tools of intervention and research (questionnaires, focus groups) in order to create a facilitating setting of discussion for participants concerning community's social themes. Professionals propose themselves with a consulting function.

- Educative Intervention/Training: the development of intervention is based on the 'recommendations' presented in literature on the 'evidence based' research or in a specific theory. The objective of this work is to get measurable results, such as skills and knowledge, that scientific field defines suitable for a defined context. The peculiarity of intervention is found in the process of creating a membership, proposing a bottom-up dynamics, prior to the time of learning of specific skills. The project is guided by general goals that can be achieved, to think of them as a formative moment in which the final contents and ideals of the discipline of reference are transmitted to the community. Professionals assume the role of trainers; the methodology envisages the use of quantitative tools, useful to measure change, understood as acquisition of new skills.

- Intervention in group/orientation: the intervention is an activity of consulting/orientation in case of an emerging problem in a organizational structure. The community is involved in researching competences for which it is assumed there is a high potential of adaptation to the environment and to success, that are present but not obvious at the starting moment of the intervention. This aims to bring/suggest/advise potentials that are not expressed because not considered appropriate in that context.

The methodology proposes a first phase of suspension of the organizational action, that permits discussion on its regular dynamics. There is a second phase where the professionals are responsible for proposing/advice/show a new praxis. Professionals assume the role of technicians in a specific area of social reality.

- Involved Action Research: the intervention is aimed at promoting tools of reflection that can lead to plan a strategy of action for community. The work consists in setting-up a motivation of action, based on the affiliation sentiment of the group and of social claim for owner's rights. The action-research identifies the first action context of community in the intervention itself: participants are involved in the role of researchers, while professionals share the values of community. Qualitative research tools are used, such as interviews, content and discourse analysis, in order to give an overview to community when the intervention is in progress and to use these tools as an object of learning for participants. The distance between professionals and community dwindles: participants assume the role of co-researchers, while professionals the militant one, defenders of a certain cause.

- Engaging Action Research: the work proceeds from a demand of intervention posed by a specific agency, often of public statute, compared to a general issue detected in a certain context.

Action Research is a method that proposes a consciousness process, from bottom to up, in view to a set of problems for which the community can feel not involved. The first objective of methodology of intervention is to translate the problems pointed out by the social mandate in comprehensible and understandable dimensions for community. Later, the work will aim to develop an awareness of these issues, which results will be used for processes of action from the community, and for a more focused intervention from the part of official policy. Regarding these two objectives, the research tools can be both of a qualitative and quantitative nature. The professional (often

there is an équipe) assumes the role of external researcher and avails himself of internal members of community (key-participants, lay-researchers...) as mediators of the relation.

- Data collection: in this type of methodology is given more importance to the specifically research activity than to the intervention one. The work is directed to data collection. The wording "Action Research" or "community based" is used to underline: 1) the implication of the researcher in the research process; 2) the subject's interest to the object of study.

The methodology uses research tools as questionnaires, interviews and focus-groups. The outcomes are considered as "attitudes", "knowledge", "behaviours" of community towards the object of study.

- Rehabilitative Intervention: methodology relates to therapeutic intervention for: a) rehabilitation of individual or group, in relation to social skills, useful for a better adaptation to environment; b) normalization of individual in reference to psychopathological dimensions, by implication of the subject in a community activity. The intervention has as objective the reduction of individual deficit; the professional intervenes as psychotherapist or expert in the application of a rehabilitation protocol, that has to be adapted to the contextual situation. The intervention foresees a verification with quantitative methods, among which the experimental one is the preferred.

- Psychological first aid: the intervention proposes familiar tools and methods to facilitate meetings, in a community that is going through a period of crisis, as consequence of a grave incident or a catastrophic event or a hard stressing social situation. The work will consist of providing daily meeting activities, that community is not more able to provide for itself. Professionals assume a function of external support to community.

#### *Representations of Community:*

- Organization/individual dimensions: community is conceived in a specific organizational reality. It has its general mode of operation which is influenced/derives by the personal qualities of the individual members. Group dynamics are conceived as a necessary mean to work on personal qualities.

- Organization/working skills: community is conceived as an organization structure that is related to a working activity. The salient features of the group are as suitable or less to interface to the working dimension. These features correspond to individual skills, not strictly psychological, useful to carry out the activities and to interface to a third party with whom the community is in a relationship.

- Organization/organizational culture: community is conceived as an organization defined by some factors: a structure, an objective, an organizational culture. The organizational culture corresponds to various and stratified, in different measures, symbolic representations, concerning a contextual pattern of relations between members, that permits to link activities and characteristics of the organizations to a signification code of events.

- Resident population needs: community is conceived as a demographically defined reality, requiring concrete services for inhabitants. Generally it's possible to indicate a "territorial population", characterized for demanding needs and requests in the hic et nunc, above all in political and health plans.

- Shared symbolic representations: community is conceived as a whole of social shared and historically connoted representations. This community provides a dimension of affiliation that is transversal to organizations included in the same community; it hasn't an explicit productive bond that organises the rapports between members. In this conception is given special relevance to a general dimension distinguishing the community, expressed with psychological concepts as

'Identity' and 'Culture', rather than to an individual one. The objects of community are representative of its culture and express its meanings, which can be various and stratified, as consequence of particular historical processes that community has gone through.

- Formal dimensions/disadvantaged community: community is conceived as a structure defined by some concepts able to be generalized and quantified, in relation to different contexts. It is a formal rather than an ideal entity, linked to repeatable and standardized sizes, related to a model of reference (sense of community, leadership, empowerment, knowledge, etc.).

Most of studies refer to interventions directed to social disadvantaged communities, for which the struggle to obtain social rights is an original characteristic, a main feature associated to community. Community is characterized by social rights, by the attainment of socially suitable objectives, by the capacity to let the democratic debate develop from the inside, by the struggle to obtain civil rights. By means of the pursuit of these objectives, it's possible to work on formal dimensions, common to each community.

- Individual dimensions/research sample: community consists in a set of individuals sharing the interest or a more generic implication for an event. This object of sharing is thought as an independent variable, characterizing the individuals; the exchange on the inside of community, between its members, is not necessary; it is rather activated toward the researcher. The community is conventionally created by the researcher.

- Individual dimensions/community: community is considered as a series of individuals with specific individual characteristics. Roles and values notable in community are seen as a product generated by the comparison of single stories and affiliations, linked to psychological personal qualities (coping strategies, resiliency factors, qualities of thinking, etc...).

Action Research in the international literature

#### *Brief history of the origins*

"Action Research" is the widely shared definition in relation to psychological interventions addressed to communities. The term "Psychosocial Intervention" can be traced in different Schools, but is the Psychosociology in France that systematically makes use of it to indicate a praxis of intervention addressed to the change in organizational structures. Psychosociology often utilizes the wording "Psychosociological Intervention", while the wording "Psychosocial Intervention" seems to be transversally used in Italy and in the international context. Since historical periods and social dynamics that are at the birth of these two methodologies seem to be the same, in this section we refer, for the most part, to the history of "Action Research" and to how its characteristics could be thought in common with Psychosocial Intervention.

Founding Father of the methodology "Action-Research" is generally recognized in Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), known – in general psychology – also for the *field theory*, *the Gestalt approach* and *the Galilean perspective for research in laboratory*, *the styles of leadership*, etc... all themes that, in the same life of the Author, weaved together, so they contributed to connote the origins of our own object of interest, the Action-Research. Many of these dimensions have indeed found their own scientific development, in the course of years, being – in Lewin's conceptualizations – often concomitant: he has indeed constantly devoted himself to the project of a general epistemological change. Concerning the fatherhood of Action-Research, Lewin has been abreast by some other contemporary authors. Among those, the differences are various and relevant, in relation to the utilised approaches.

For Lewin the action-research had the meaning of a strategy of action in the social field, in which the action is controlled and carried out by means of the *forces of field* (Lewin, 1947). The action-research so was for Lewin an *intervention in social relations* in which the psychologist could get in by means of the field theory and the social change theory (Lewin, 1944).

The Lewin's works on groups carried out most of all during his permanence in United States; the Author, let's remember, arrived in USA as consequence of the rise of Nazism in Germany, where he was born. From Germany Lewin brought with him a solid psychological training in experimental field, grown with the group of Gestalt, when he studied with Wertheimer, Kofka, Kohler; but he brought with him also the desire to affect concretely the social systems, toward a *democratic climate* rather than an *authoritarian* or *laissez-faire* one. Another important question, concerning the training of Lewin and what leded him to do some choices afterwards, was related to the epistemological point of view: Lewin tried always to conceive the psychology's utility in relation to real systems, composed by people; to bring the psychology in this dimension (that afterwards took the form of the field theory) the discipline should do a revolutionary operation, in view of the traditional methods of scientific research in laboratory, not appropriate to study the real world. This change was analogous to the revolution that the galileian discoveries brought, confronting to the Aristotelian dominant knowledge. For Lewin psychology was prisoner of its own will of measuring everything with precision and of considering its object always repeatable; this was an Aristotelian approach, that could be changed if a Gestalt perspective to 'situate an object' was been assumed: not more starting from the forces of the object itself (for example, taking the concept of instinct), but *situating the figure in relation to background and its environment*. This was a Galilean perspective, that leded to conceive the psychologist not more as an external and neutral observer, but as an active subject in the field of the studied object.

In USA Lewin worked in many interventions addressed to social systems, thanks to the *field theory*. They were interventions in communities and organizations. A central point of his theory of social change consisted in conceiving changes – in individual behaviour – modifiable by means of interventions in groups, just thanks to the affiliation of members to those ones. But the *group climate* itself was modifiable by some key members, that in a specific field can assume a function of *gate-keeper*.

At the death of Lewin, in 1947, his contributions were able to create a strong market demand towards this "Nuova Psicologia". His students and successors developed some specific areas: Bradford created, a few months after the death of his master, the *National Training Laboratory*, that worked in training experiences with means of the principal instrument of T-Group. Lippit talks in 1958 about *planned-change* (Lippit, Watson & Westley, 1958), pursuing the reflections on action-research: a client-system that is confronted with a specialised consultants system. Client-system can be constituted by: a person, a group, an organization, a community.

Other Authors that can be thought as co-founders of action-research are: Moreno, Mayo, Alinsky, together with the works engaged by the Tavistock Institute just before the second world war, and that pursued in post-war period (Dubost & Lévy, 2005).

Moreno (1889 – 1974) worked in group therapy introducing some specific and innovative ideas on the conduction, using techniques as socio-drama and psycho-drama, refusing the dictates of social conventional science that wanted the psychologist in an external position in relation to subjects.

Mayo was a psychologist that utilised the *personal counselling* as instrument to address the organizational change, in the period between the two wars. Even if the method he used (individual interviews with company personnel) is considered to have a marginal value in relation to the communitarian vocation of Action-Research, his work has affected the whole theoretic-methodological corpus concerning change in organizational systems.

Alinsky worked in USA in the period between the two wars: he earned the degree in criminology in 1930, in the sociological school of Chicago, and he devoted his life to the emancipator action of social communities; his modality of intervention is not very focused on the research activity, instead he centred his efforts on the organization of social struggles for disadvantaged communities; his educative strategies and his conception of the collaboration process are clearly expressed in his last book, written a year before his death, *Rules for Radicals* (1971).

The Tavistock is an English clinic developed during the first world war. Professionals that worked there, in the period between the two wars, were psychiatrists and dynamic psychologists, that tried in these first years of activity to join their analytic competences with the ones of other social disciplines, like sociology and anthropology, to intervene in community. The English communities were constituted, in these first years of '900, by groups of veterans that could find, with the intervention of clinicians of Tavistock, an easier social reintegration. Illustrious examples of these

interventions in communities are represented by the works of Bion and Rickman, but afterwards the works carried on and made contact with over 4000 civil associations in England. Afterwards the works of Tavistock benefited from the contributions of other methodologies, addressed to a change of culture in the commitment organizations, thanks to the works of new exponents like Jaques and Trist, in '50 and '60. This group has conceived the moment of research, in the Action-Research, also as a work of theoretical reprocessing, referred to scientific community, not only as a work to carry out with the own clients.

These are, in a brief excursus, the mother lodes regarding the origins of methodology of Action-Research.

Every School put many cues into the "field" of methodology; some of them seem to propose dichotomies, or anyway they seem to have very different starting points: individual dimension/communitarian dimension; generalizing research/contextual research; closed structure/open community; needs/relations, etc. All this would deserve a space and a reflection that it's not possible to find in this place. Nevertheless this study has the purpose to point out as these different legacies of methodology of intervention in community can be notable still today, when we have to do with the experiences of psychologists belonging to different scientific fields, reported and published in international Journals. The Operative Definitions of Intervention (criterion IV) and the Representations of Community (criterion V) have the task to fulfil this function.

#### Analysis of Data

The variable "Year of Publication" has not a random distribution in ARC (chi-square value: 15,647); this shows a more definite increase as more as the publications are recent – 56,9% from 2008 to 2011 – (tab. 4). In PIC there is not this imbalance, the publications seem to be distributed randomly (tab. 2).

The reports refer to experiences carried out in 18 different Countries (criterion II); those with more experiences are USA (19) and Canada (17), then Australia (7) and UK (5). To follow there are Countries with one or two experiences on their territory. We have chosen to highlight the territories where works were led by foreign professionals. These are 8 at all (tab. 1). The chi-square test (15,671) confirms the non randomness of the "foreign" distribution (level of significance at 5%) referred to School of Reference (criterion III). The Schools associated to a "foreign" intervention are 3: Health Psychology (f = 2), Community Psychology (f = 3), Emergency Psychology (f = 3). Schools of Reference (criterion III) are 9. Among them, Health Psychology (f = 26) and Community Psychology (f = 19) have the most published studies; to follow, Environmental Psychology (4) and Emergency Psychology (4). We note that the 60 studies together, related just to the third variable, generate a chi-square value (102,00) that satisfies the level of significance at 1%: it's possible to affirm that the distribution of publications, in relation to the single variable "School of Reference", is not random (tab. 1).

**Variables: School of Reference; Nationality.**

**Table 1**

		School									Total
		Health Ps.	Community Ps.	Systemic-Relational	Construct.	Environmental Ps.	Cognitive Ps.	Antropology	Organizational Ps.	Emergency Ps.	
Authors	National	24	16	1	2	4	2	1	1	1	52
	Foreigner	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8
Total		26	19	1	2	4	2	1	1	4	60

Randomness of distribution for variables School and Nationality  
Chi-square value: 15,671  
Critical value for statistical significance at 5%: 15,51

Randomness of distribution for the single variable School  
Chi-square value: 102,00  
Critical value for statistical significance at 1%: 20,09



Still considering the single third variable, but distinguishing the two enquiries ARC and PIC, the outcomes change. In ARC chi-square value remains high (79,980), permitting to confirm the non-randomness of distribution (tab. 4). In PIC (tab. 2) the chi-square value decreases (2,000) and it's not possible to affirm that the School of Reference variable distinguishes the way articles are published.

These data assert the fact that publications in PIC are submitted by only 3 schools of reference (Emergency, Health and Community), but when we consider the single PIC enquiry is not possible to refuse the hypothesis that the order between these 3 variables is random.

Results concerning PIC enquiry.  
Table 2

Variables: Community; Intervention PI

		Community			Total
		Resident pop. needs	Individual dimensions - research sample	Individual dimensions - community	
Intervention	Rehabilitation	2	1	4	7
	Psychological first aid	1	0	1	2
	Total	3	1	5	9

Significance level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 0,514  
Critical value: 5,99

**Null Hypothesis is accepted. The two categorical variables "Intervention" and "Community" are independent.**

Single variable: Publication Year

		Frequency	Percentage
Publication Year	2000-2003	1	11,1
	2004-2007	5	55,6
	2008-2011	3	33,3
Total		9	100,0

Significance level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 2,667  
Critical value: 5,99

**Null Hypothesis is accepted. The distribution of the "Year of Publication" variable is random.**

Single Variable: School of Reference

Scuola	Frequenza
Health Ps.	4
Community Ps.	1
Emergency Ps.	4
Total	9

Significance level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 2,000  
Critical value: 5,99

**Null Hypothesis is accepted. The distribution of the "School of Reference" variable is random.**

It's considered the IV (intervention) and V (community) variables in their own co-occurrence (tab. 3).

The test of chi-square (134,411) affirms that the two variables are mutually dependent, in a level of significance of 1%. The higher frequencies are observed in the co-occurrence between: Involved action research and Formal dimensions-disadvantaged communities (10); Engaging action research and Resident population needs (8).

Interdependence between Intervention and Community on the 60 articles.

Table 3

Community	Intervention								Total
	Engaging AR	Involved AR	Educative Training	Data collection	Rehabilitative	Psycho. first aid	Dev. Symbolic Dimension	Group-Orientation	
Res. pop. needs	8	1	0	4	3	1	0	0	17
Shared symbolic representations	4	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	8
Formal dimensions-disadvantaged community	3	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	14
Org.-working skills	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	3	8
Org.-individual dimensions	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Individual dim.-research sample	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	5
Org.-organizational culture	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Individual dim.-community	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>60</b>

Chi-square: 134,411

Critical value for significance level at 1%: 74,92

With 4 and 3 frequencies we find many co-occurrences: Data collection/Resident population needs (4); Rehabilitative intervention/Resident population needs (3); Engaging AR/Development of symbolic dimensions (4); Engaging AR / Formal dimensions-disadvantaged community (3); Educative intervention-training/Organization-working skills (3); Intervention in group-orientation/Organization-working skills (3); Data collection/Individual dimensions-research sample (3); Rehabilitative intervention/Individual dimensions-community (4).

Even in this occasion it's possible to observe a change, when we distinguish the analysis in PIC and in ARC, applying the chi-square test for the independence of the two variables. Chi-square in ARC (92,048) remains significant, instead in PIC decreases (0,514) and it's not possible to confirm the dependence between the values of Intervention and Community variables.

As before, these data affirm the possibility to think the distribution of total publications as significant, related to the two variables Intervention and Community in common between PIC and ARC<sup>5</sup>, but delimiting the research only at PIC field is no more possible to confirm that hypothesis.

<sup>5</sup> In ARC there are 7 subcategories of Intervention and 7 subcategories of Community; among these 14, 3 are present also in PIC. Nevertheless in PIC appear two new categories, absent in ARC: Psychological first aid; Individual dimensions/community.

Clearly, including a third variable to co-occur, data in PIC field will remain non significant. Delimiting the research field to ARC and adding the third variable "School of Reference" to co-occur between Intervention and Community (tab.5), some data become significant.

The Psychological School with most influence in the distribution of articles related to the co-occurrence between the two variables Intervention and Community is "Community Psychology". Its chi-square value (36,186) satisfies the significance level at 5%. In that occasion it's possible to observe a dominant co-occurrence: "Involved AR / Formal dimensions-disadvantaged communities" (f = 9). To follow, "Health Psychology" presents a chi-square value (19,873) just a little lower the significance level at 5%; chi-square value becomes significant if the probability level is turned up to 7%. In this case the dominance of Intervention is for the subcategory "Engaged AR" (f = 10), which is distributed in the co-occurrence with two subcategories of Community: "Resident population needs" (5) and "Shared symbolic representations" (4). It's possible to observe two other co-occurrences: Educative intervention-training/Organization-working skills (3) and Data collection/Resident population needs (3).

Furthermore: the other two Schools for which is possible to calculate the chi-square value are Environmental psychology (8,000) and Constructivism (2,000). For both chi-square is not significant with a level of 5%, though in the first case it is higher (tab. 5).

Table 4.  
Results concerning ARC enquiry.

	Variables: Intervention; Community A/R										Total
	Res. pop. needs	Shared symbolic representation	Formal dim.-disadvantaged community	Community	Org.-Working skills	Org.-Individual dimensions	Individual dim.-research sample	Org.-organizational culture			
Engaging A/R	8	4	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	16
Involved A/R	1	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Educative-Training	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Data Collection	4	2	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	11
Rehabilitative	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Symbolic Dimensions	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
Group-Oriented	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	14	8	14	8	2	4	1	1	1	1	51

Significance level: 0,01  
Chi-square value: 92,048  
Critical value: 58,62

Historical variables "Intervention" and "Community" are dependent.

Table: School of Reference A/R

	Frequenza	Percentuale
Health Ps.	22	43,1
Community Ps.	18	35,3
Thematic-Relational	1	2,0
Constructivism	2	3,9
Environmental Ps.	4	7,8
Cognitivist Ps.	2	3,9
Psychology	1	2,0
Organization Ps.	1	2,0
Total	51	100,0

Significance level: 0,01  
Chi-square value: 79,980  
Critical value: 18,48

on of the "School of Reference" variable is non random.

Single Variable: Publication Years A/R

Publication Years	Frequenza	Percentuale
2000-2003	6	11,8
2004-2007	16	31,4
2008-2011	29	56,9
Total	51	100,0

Significance level: 0,01  
Chi-square value: 15,647  
Critical value: 9,21

The distribution of the "Publication Years" variable is not random.

Table 5  
Results concerning ARC enquiry.

Variables: Intervention; Community; School of reference A/R

School of reference	Health Ps.	Comunità							Total
		Res. pop. needs	Shared symbolic represent.	Formal Disadvantage of community	Org./Working skills	Org. Individual dimensions	Individual dim./research sample	Org./organizational culture	
	Intervention	Engaging A/R	5	4	0	0	0	1	10
		Educative-Training	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
		Data collection	3	1	1	1	1	1	6
		Rehabilitative	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Group-Orientation	0	0	2	2	0	0	2
	Total		9	5	6	6	2	2	22
Community Ps.	Intervention	Engaging A/R	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
		Involved A/R	1	1	9	0	0	0	11
		Educative-Training	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
		Data Collection	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
		Dev. Symbolic Dimensions	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
	Total		2	3	11	1	1	1	18
Systemic-relational	Intervention	Educative-Training			1				1
	Total				1				1
Constructivism	Intervention	Engaging A/R			1			0	1
		Dev. Symbolic Dimensions			0			1	1
	Total				1			1	2
Environmental Ps.	Intervention	Engaging A/R	2		0			0	2
		Involved A/R	0		1			0	1
		Data collection	0		0			1	1
	Total		2		1			1	4
Cognitivist Ps.	Intervention	Data collection				1		1	2
	Total					1		1	2
Anthropology	Intervention	Engaging A/R	1						1
	Total		1						1
Organization Ps.	Intervention	Group-Orientation				1			1
	Total					1			1

Community Psychology.  
Significance Level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 36,186  
Critical value: 26,30  
The categorical variables "Community Ps.", "Intervention" and "Community" are interdependent.

Health Psychology.  
Significance Level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 19,873  
Critical value: 21,03  
For Significance Level at 0,07 critical value is 19,873.  
The categorical variables "Health psychology", "Intervention" and "Community" are dependent for a significance of 7%.

Environmental Psychology.  
Significance Level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 6,000  
Critical value: 9,49  
The categorical variables "Intervention" and "Community" are independent.

Constructivism.  
Significance Level: 0,05  
Chi-square value: 2,000  
Critical value: 3,84  
The categorical variables "Constructivism", "Intervention" and "Community" are independent.

### *Discussion.*

The data collected show a field of research and intervention rather different. Two categories of intervention and two representations of community, as presented in this article, are most significant for what in international Journals is named "Action-Research" and "Community"; the most important co-occurrences in ARC are: a) Engaging Action Research and Resident Population Needs; b) Involved Action Research and Formal Dimensions/Disadvantaged Community. Psychosocial Intervention area is not "dominated" by single praxis of intervention or representations of community, but anyway it's relevant for us the shift towards "curative" interventions and "individualistic" representations of context that is possible to understand from the categories involved.

### *Data in ARC inquiry field*

The two most frequent co-occurrences in ARC present different characteristics, even in opposition. The first co-occurrence a) expresses an intervention that starts from official policies, that assumes the requests of social mandate (often articles refer to health context) and that is directed to the population of a territory, towards whom it seems *in anyway* destined an intervention.

Health Psychology is the school most involved in this co-occurrence; this School proposes some other co-occurrences, highlighting the internal different tendencies of the School: we notice a more directive approach of intervention, where professionals present clear functions and objectives related to their action, towards a community seen for its 'individual' and 'measurable' dimensions; on the other hand we notice an interesting co-occurrence, between Engaging AR and Shared symbolic representations (4), that talks about a cultural and historic perspective that psychologists have on their context of intervention. So we have an intervention tendency that seems to lean on individualistic and informative legacies, another perspective that doesn't consider anymore as sufficient the interpretation *ad litteram* of needs of a population, and that turns its work towards cultural symbolic objects. In this new perspective what is expressed from community is considered the clue of a larger system, of a cultural code. Articles that present this point of view are often reports of complex experiences: they propose problems detected on field.

These different perspectives highlighted in Health Psychology reflect the current methodological change concerning the health-medical area of intervention in community. A traditional treatment perspective of community is progressively being substituted by a social and participatory perspective. The basic idea is that any territorial health service would be better used from community if it would be felt as own, as a part of the context. The intervention of Health Psychology in this field is incident to what is traditionally thought to be as prevention activity and that generally makes use of informative / training / orientation strategies towards a target population, related to a general problem. These strategies – the same pointed out for Health Psychology in this research, traceable in the co-occurrences with lower frequencies – propose a difference between the one who executes a training task, related to certain target behaviours (in this research: use of condoms; alcohol consumption; adopting safety measures in working) and the one who constitutes a potential population of onset risk. The intervention in this article defined "engaging action research" aims to bring into question this 'distance'. The hypothesis formulated is that the sharing of community to the decisional process, like the adoption of new initiatives, can

constitute the pivotal point of a health intervention gearing a stronger efficacy for it. So there is the problem of adopting a new praxis, that can place its bases not more in the etiopathogenetic knowledge of a disorder, but in a new diagnostic code that can be used to direct operators to a planning stage of intervention. Among the read texts, one of the most interesting concerning this question was: "The social determinants of health. The solid facts" (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2003). It is the report of a research commissioned by the World Health Organization to the Regional Office for Europe. Marmot and Wilkinson studied some morbidity and mortality rates related not only to classic dimensions of poverty, intended as material dimension of deprivation of essential goods, but as a more general socio-economic dimension. An example used in the text is about Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. These populations have a low mortality rate for less of 5 years old children: 12,5/1000, but at the same time an expectation of life 20 years lower than neighbouring Australians. This difference can not be attributed to infectious illnesses due to unhygienic conditions. Authors suggest that the *marginalization factor* explains, reasonably, the difference. Poverty so is not sufficient to explain alone morbidity and mortality rates; moreover is well-known as in rich Countries personal income and life expectancy are not correlated.

In this case social marginalization finds a sense if it is studied in relation to specific populations, since researches specific needs of population.

In this new perspective is placed the use of methodology Action-Research, conceived as an intervention that aims the sharing of problem in specific contexts, starting his work with a social mandate coming from the scientific community and health policy. The "social marginalization" factor is the expression of this mandate, and constitutes the socio-economical variable of poverty. This becomes a factor of operative sense if it is situated in the specificity of the context and filled with that "solid facts" that local community can suggest. This tendency permits also to understand why this approach identifies a community with its needs, necessities, lacks.

The second co-occurrence significant in ARC is b) Involved Action Research and Formal dimensions-disadvantaged communities; it is associated to Community Psychology. In the model we have presented before is highlighted a perspective of intervention that is brought by a strong political authority; differently, in this one the starting point is constituted by a specific community and by a claim of social rights; official policies in this case are used to allow an *identification for opposition*. Even in this case is considered the exclusion factor, but this seems to be the result of a failure of society to involve groups most disadvantaged, *by nature*, in ordinary social life. In this perspective, social exclusion corresponds to the not shared relation with power groups, to the exception from the decision-making dimension. Marginalization seems to lead to an evidence, to a *de facto* condition concerning a persecutory representation of context and at the same time original of group. The motivation to make social struggle, contrast, claim, becomes a granted consequence of these affiliation groups.

The evidence of certain affiliations, differently from the first examined perspective, seems to be functional to the psychologist's adoption of community values. The shared values of social struggle seems to be prevaricating and transverse to various nations: from China to Norway, up to United States and Nippon. Methodology has wondered about utile tools of intervention related to this different intervention position taken by professionals. The proposal seems to be to work, through an application program, on common dimensions – as: knowledge production; leadership; social action – for groups of membership, situated all over the World, so to permit comparison and repeatability of interventions.

What this kind of perspective is looming, is to arrive at a social action that will lay the foundations on the principles of universal human. What this perspective does not allow you to do is to work with the complexity of a specific social system. The "community organizers" have in mind the application of a model, its adaptability to the social context, but the problems posed by this are used as a pretext to organize activities related to more general formal dimensions. In this sense, the activities themselves are presented by the working team as a new exchange object for the whole community, as an event capable to reorganize affiliation dynamics just starting from the applicative proposed program.

In this model are not presented reports of critical problems that can be confronted along with the rest of the scientific community, as it did in the first co-occurrence examination. The sharing of

values of psychologists in the first place and the type of application method that follows, allows you to drive community participation to operating activities. In the sample used here there is only one guide that discusses a case of intervention failed, in which psychologists have tried until the last moment to rebuild a program application of Action Research on a community of battered women, following the continuous second thoughts of the client, in Canada (Langan & Morton, 2009).

This co-occurrence so doesn't pose a demand of change but it is quite the opposite, it is placed in a growing wave of publications that in last 8 years has let greatly increase the articles in Action-Research field. These studies have their principal base in north America, where Community Psychology is born and is mostly developed.

Remaining in the field of ARC inquiry, it's possible to observe other types of interesting interventions and communities, though they present lower frequencies: Group intervention-orientation; Data collection; Community as Organization.

It's possible to observe that since from the origins of Action-Research there was an overlapping of models, more strictly linked to other fields: clinical, experimental research, social psychology researching individual factors, intervention in organizations, etc... what seemed a common point for the various psychological cultures gravitating around the name of Action-Research was so not really a specific intervention methodology or a phenomenon of reality, but rather a tendency to a general epistemological change, the lewinian "nuova psicologia" [new psychology]. Lewin himself seemed to give, in our opinion, more importance to field theory than to action-research: theoretic model would permit the intervention in social relations, without delimiting them to a specific phenomenon of reality by means of a common sense definition. Anyway the word "action" seems to have mythically attracted the interest of the scientific community, interested to a change of perspective, change concerning the research and the intervention that Lewin had deepened and synthesized.

We refer to the process of mythologizing of an object as it speaks for Roland Barthes (1957), as a semiological system of a second level, such as to metonymically highlight single real parts of the object in relation to socially shared sense that you want to express. Concerning Action-Research, it's possible still today to think that methodologies traditionally linked to other fields, can flow into this category, thanks to the mythologizing of concepts of *change*, *active position* of researcher, *influence on reality*, interest and *participation of community* referred to the research object. These last are the sense categories expressed by some intervention models pertaining to Action-Research, and that in this research are posed under the label "group-orientation", "data collection".

The discussion of the results has tried to offer a broad view of what may be integrated in the prospective of the Action Research. Two general tendencies that we have highlighted with the two co-occurrences that we have examined before, talk about a) an intervention that aims to involve community in programming specific political and health measures in its own territory; b) an intervention that prefigures the change as militancy, social struggle, by means of a model that tends to be generalized and repeatable. So it's possible to presume that the difference between the two are also on the axe of specificity/generality. This factor allows to highlight different perspectives that, at the starting point, can be thought as a common point of view: reality is equivalent to concrete facts - the *solid facts*. In the second co-occurrence they assume the shape of rights for citizens, it seems a shape predestined by the model itself; in the first co-occurrence the solid facts correspond to the specific demands of context towards official health and social policies. What seems to be less present in these publications is a psychological model that proposes to intervene on a symbolic aspects of reality; as already discussed, the Engaging AR model seems to pose this perspective as the issue of a problematic report with factual demands, however the operational proposals are struggling to find their way to a new practice.

In the articles of this research we have found only two experiences reporting a work of change intended in its cultural and symbolic dimension: the one in a school in Maryland (USA) where a psychologist was called for the diffused problem of bullying (Lorion, 2004); another in a rural community, Pingzhai, in a district of south-west China, reporting problems of poverty, unemployment, marginalization (Hok-Bun Ku, 2011).

The first case is about an organizational intervention, in a defined structure: a school. Here the psychologist focuses on the importance of not taking literally the application requirements of the customer - parents first and then teachers - because doing so would mean to act "as if" what is required to be clear and shared, could be the prelude to a consistent action towards this issue of bullying among students. The psychologist on the contrary organizes meetings with parents to talk together of the perspectives on bullying, and later also with the teachers. The suspension of the power to "solve" problems brought by the clients, constitutes for the Author the first professional "action".

In the second experience, an university team makes a plan of intervention in Yunnan, China, in the little village of Pingzhai. This community was recently upset by a policy of social redevelopment undertaken by central policy. This intervention brought farm technologies, modern and consumer life styles with the intention of substituting costumes and traditions of the little village, linked to traditional crop methods that didn't permit an appropriate level of life; the district was in fact one of the most poor of China. As consequence of this intervention, Pingzhai became even poorer. Author talks about a community depressed at the inside and idealized in the outside, an outside that was arrogant and profiteer towards simpletons peasants that perhaps for the first time went out from their village, searching for a job. They were indeed reinforced to return with a sense of frustration for what had happened and the idea of being constrained to leave again, since at that time the village seemed inadequate even for them, for its incapacity to offer reference points of a global and modern China. This phenomenon caused another, the exodus of women labour: women were constrained to go out from Pingzhai and leave their children, because the heads of households were not more able to sustain their close relatives.

Psychologists entered in this social context. They decided to interview inhabitants, often distrustful. They discovered that, three generations before (the fathers of interviewed people) community had still a strong textile activity, developed very complex tools in handicraft, created in the course of centuries. Weaving constituted the moment of common life, of staying together, of education of children that confronted with elders and the wonder of the creation of objects. There was an incredible competence, said the old people, in recognizing the type of ground and flowers that could grow on; flowers served to give the colour to cloths. All was in a direct relation to nature, but nature itself was not intended with a "naturalized" or concrete sense, their fruits constituted the deep symbolic sense of community, its soul; the delicacy of handicraft competences, built through the centuries, called to mind the magic as vehicle of knowledge in relation between man and nature. Furthermore, weaving was all along an activity linked to female population, and in this village too.

Psychologists understood all this. They proposed the renovations of ancient tools, thanks to knowledge that elder people had kept alive. It was set a plan of education days on ancient crafts, where younger people could listen to what elders had to say. It was created a group of women, not many, that aimed to newly get off the ground the activity of textile producing little objects. The thing worked well, the group expanded and was created a out-and-out organization with the intention of investing on their products. Finally the community could go out from the village, not more at the mercy of new unscrupulous employers, rather researching new interesting markets for their competences. Particularly moving was the meeting between the craftswomen of Pingzhai and the participants to an international conference on Rural Social Work, where the group was invited: village women were timid, hidden in a corner, until even the presents became interested to showed products and asked for meaning and history of them. From here on, the growing of the group seemed to be not stoppable: organization entered in several markets, it had its own budget, created a website, produced objects in view of specific events, expanded itself and accepted new personnel.

The report ends with what was in program to do in December of 2010, in particular concerning a Museum of embroidery of community.

We lingered on telling this experience, which expresses a radical change compared to the point of view focusing on the real needs of a community. It's important to note that the change of perspective is not due to a different objective situation: even in this case there is a marginalized community, poor, exploited, needy, without social rights, demanding concrete things linked to



modernity. The team, we want to underline it, has intended all this in the social perspective of an identity crisis:

"In the course of working with the villagers in Pingzhai for approximately seven years, we found out that the primary reason for rural poverty is not low levels of education, poor quality of land, remoteness of villages, lack of technological expertise, or unfamiliarity with the market economy. It is the villagers' sense of losing control – their passivity in the entire development process. While development has brought new ideas, resources, and technologies to local communities, it has also created unrealistic expectations, inequalities, social exclusion, and a crisis in cultural identity" (p. 24, Hok-Bun Ku, 2011).

We consider this research significant, since it allows to query about dominant perspectives that refer to an objective rational and a-symbolic reality.

#### *Data in PIC inquiry field*

Three Psychological Schools are included in this inquiry field: Community Psychology, Health Psychology and Emergency Psychology. There seems to be here a net shift to the action on the deficit and individualistic perspective: the community is seen as an anthropological or psychosocial factor taken into account in order to propose measures for treatment and prevention that may have a greater effect on the individual. One of the factors that distinguishes this model, and that poses a substantial difference with the Action Research, is the *emotional distance* of the relationship between professionals and the community, the difference in roles, where the Action Research offers insistently 'exchange' between participants and researchers that in many cases can even become confusing.

Emergency Psychology proposes to have a *technical and distant approach* towards a situation with strong emotional impact that psychologists have to face. In these works the emotional contagion becomes a deeply-rooted risk for the type of situation (Hobfoll et al. 2007). On the other hand, even in case of a first aid situation, these types of intervention propose a rehabilitative technical competence, which objective is to increase quality of life for individuals and community. In one sense this second research field proposes intervention models that Action-Research tends to criticize: technical, distant, strictly centred in delimitation of different roles. Models flowing to PIC seem to be clung to an etiopathogenetic medical knowledge that, starting from a diagnostic, conducts to a coherent therapy. Beyond Emergency Psychology, it seems so relevant to consider Health Psychology. In ARC research field, doing reference to data, we made the hypothesis that Health Psychology is going through a moment of change in the social mandate, from a traditional medical model it is moving to participative models. Referred to publications in PIC, it is not possible to formulate the same hypothesis for the same School. If in ARC is expressed, by means of reports, a change dynamics and a research of new parameters of intervention to face contextual specificities, reports in PIC seem to be projected in a dynamics of static and generalization of data; so the reference to psychosocial dimension contained in these studies seems to give importance to some factors, thought as a prerogative of the single individual - such as: stress, perceived disability, catastrophic thinking, etc. - in a confirmative perspective of results, foreseen by the same rehabilitation praxis, that doesn't propose a reflection of its own intervention prerogatives. The static dimension seems furthermore to be reflected by the non-significance of chi-square value in the variable "year of publication", fact that highlights the a-historical and a-contextual tendency of a social science that aims to intervene on deficit by means of an experimental verification methodology.

#### *Conclusions*

Articles published in ARC and PIC provide an interesting base of inquiring for how psychological interventions in community are thought. Detected categories and data analysis in this research have conducted to formulate hypothesis about intervention typologies, community representations and the epistemological context pertaining this field.

The article examines the differences between the two research fields, ARC and PIC, and their articulations inside. Reports present in PIC seem to be clung to a psychological current, seeking for deficit and invariances in population, upon which to intervene referring to an etiopathogenetic knowledge. Publications in ARC transversally criticize this approach, from different angles. In this second field of inquiry there are two principal approaches, that in different ways attempt to 'intervene together' the population of a territory, or with members belonging to an organization. We have formulated for these two perspectives, even proposing very different praxis and epistemological views, the hypothesis that they have an equivalent representational starting point, that is the view of reality as 'solid facts'. Then this point of view takes different directions: the first proposes the research of tangible needs of population, the second aims the application of a praxis that, mitigating the internal conflicts, prefigures a work of growth of community, related to general and formal dimensions. What the two approaches seem to have in common and that issues from a concrete view of reality, is the project of a conformist change, proposing a modality of living together preordained and normalized. Other more traditional approaches here evidenced seem to find their place in ARC thanks to their pursued tendency to novelty and change in relation to normal praxis. It is finally underlined the presence, though a minority measure, of a methodology that is addressed to social change, intended in its historical and symbolic dimension; through this approach it seems possible for psychology to intervene promoting development projects.

This article has as objective to promote the discussion on perspectives of current interventions in community, in scientific international field, highlighting the contributions and the wide margins of development of a psychology geared to the intervention on symbolic shared dimensions, overcoming a 'concrete' and ingenuous reading of social contexts.

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