

At dinner with “us”: exploring the conviviality space with newcomers and host communities

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Paper

Text

During the last conference of the ESREA Life History and Biography Network all delegates were invited in groups, included me, to different homes for a soup and sharing stories in Bergen city (Norway). This exciting experience was first of all completely new for me: speaking to each other in a conviviality space (in a foreign country!) and sharing our uniqueness, not only as researcher, but as humans over a delicious meal cooked with care for “us”, a diverse group of strangers. I was inspired to go back to my research field with a new sensibility on conviviality space in adult education. In this paper I share autoethnographic reflections about my way to be activist in a larger research project involving asylum-seekers, refugees, native citizens, professionals, and researchers. I live and work (as researcher and adult educator) in the North of Italy where, according to Amnesty International Italy, migrants and social actors active in their integration have been targeted in hate speech discourses (Report named “Barometro dell’Odio”, 2019). Throughout my research experience attention is paid to the role of sharing food practice in informal space with newcomers and host communities. Italians have one of the richest culinary traditions in the world, with deep roots in embodied narratives, but what happens when native citizens (also researchers) are invited to dinner by newcomers? Group experience is life experience and food is one of the most powerful connective tools we have: it stimulates all of our senses, evokes deep memories and connect us within wider system of interaction and complexity. I will interrogate my position as woman and researcher to focus on how the informal process of research on adult education has “transformative” effect at the meso (social) and micro (individual) levels. The paper includes different languages and style: field notes of informal conversation with migrants or social workers during lunch or coffee-break together, transcription of dialogue during private dinner organized by an association of African communities based in Milano and photos with my phone. All texts and images are interpreted to imagine new forms of activist research in adult education.

Question: What it means to be an activist and whose values we represent?

Keywords: autoethnography, embodied narratives, activism, conviviality space

References

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