AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE FEASIBILITY OF USING A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACH IN DETERMINING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF A GROUP OF COLOURED WOMEN IN EERSTERUST

by
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Summary

The primary aim of this study was to explore the feasibility of using a participatory research approach as a method for determining information needs.

Participatory research is a qualitative research methodology that challenges the principles and practices of objective, detached, quantitative research approaches in the social sciences. Three main trends converged to contribute to the emergence of the practice of participatory research namely: dissatisfaction in the development arena with the planning of projects without the involvement of the people themselves; the work of adult educators from which evolved a methodology in which learners gained control over their own learning processes; and the disenchantment of social scientists with traditional positivist research methods that distance researchers from the realities and social environment of the subjects of their research.

Dissatisfaction with the use of quantitative methods and techniques, similar to that in the social sciences, occurred in information needs research, which resulted in a call for the development of an alternative set of premises and assumptions. This effected a move away from a view of information use from a system-oriented perspective, towards the use of qualitative methods focusing on the users themselves in determining their information needs.

Both Coloureds and women in South Africa have been exposed to hardship and discrimination over many years. A literature review indicated that the planned participatory research project with Coloured women from Eersterust would be feasible. It became apparent that no studies on the information needs of Coloureds in South Africa had been done, and very little research was done dealing with the information needs of women. The literature on

participatory research furthermore clearly indicated that the concept had become familiar in a diversity of settings and disciplines outside that of development. For the purposes of this study with women, it was also of significant interest to note the many similarities between participatory research and feminist research.

With the practical implementation of the project, the pre-requisites and underlying principles of participatory research were strictly adhered to. Information needs that were identified during the course of the project were compared to needs identified in other similar South African studies.

The active involvement of the women in the research project resulted in the identification of reliable and relevant information needs. These results can serve as an example for the increasing use of qualitative techniques in determining information needs, and affirm that participatory research methods can be a valuable alternative in the area of information needs research.

Keywords: Participatory Research, Qualitative Research, Information Needs, Coloureds, Women, Coloured women, Eersterust, Feminist Research.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie studie was om ondersoek in te stel na die lewensvatbaarheid van die gebruik van 'n deelnemende navorsingsbenadering vir die bepaling van inligtingsbehoeftes.

Deelnemende navorsing is 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie wat die gebruik van objektiewe, kwantitatiewe tegnieke in die sosiale wetenskappe bevraagteken. Drie tendense het bygedra tot die ontwikkeling van die toepassing van deelnemende navorsingsmetodes naamlik: ontevredenheid binne die ontwikkelingsarena met die beplanning van projekte sonder dat die mense self daarby betrek word; die werk in volwasse-opvoeding wat gelei het tot 'n metodologie waarby leerders self beheer het oor hul leerprosesse; en die ontnugtering van navorsers in die sosiale wetenskappe met navorsingsmetodes wat navorsers distansieer van die mense en hul omstandighede met wie navorsing gedoen word.

'n Soortgelyke ontevredenhied met die gebruik van kwantitatiewe metodes en tegnieke het voorgekom in die inligtingsbehoefte-navorsingsveld. Dit het aanleiding gegee tot 'n geleidelike wegbeweeg van stelsel-georienteerde metodes vir die bepaling van inligtingsbehoeftes, na die gebruik van kwalitatiewe tegnieke wat gerig is op die gebruiker self vir die identifisering van sy behoeftes.

Beide die Kleurling en vroue het in Suid-Afrika onderdrukking en diskriminasie beleef. 'n Literatuurstudie het getoon dat die beplande deelnemende navorsingsprojek met Kleurlingvroue van Eersterust bestaansreg sou he. Dit het duidelik geword dat geen studies wat te make het met die inligtingsbehoeftes van Kleurlinge in Suid-Afrika gedoen is nie en dat weining navorsing oor inligtingsbehoeftes van vroue beskikbaar was. Deelnemende navorsingsliteratuur het vervolgens ook getoon dat die

metodologie in 'n verskeidenheid ander dissiplines buite die veld van ontwikkeling gebruik word. Vir die doel van hiedie studie met vroue, was dit ook van besondere belang om te let op die ooreenkomste tussen die beginsels van deelnemende navorsing en die van feministiese navorsing.

Tydens die praktiese implementering van die navorsingsprojek is streng daarop gelet dat daar aan die voorwaardes en basiese beginsels vir die toepassing van deelnemende navorsing voldoen word. Die inligtingsbehoeftes wat in die loop van die projek identifiseer is, is vergelyk met behoeftes wat in ander soortgelyke Suid-Afrikaanse studies bepaal is.

 Die aktiewe deelname van die vroue in die navorsingsprojek het tot gevolg gehad dat betroubare en relevante inligtingsbehoeftes identifiseer is. Hierdie resultate kan dien as voorbeeld vir die toekomstige gebruik van kwalitatiewe tegnieke in inligtingsbehoefte-studies en bevestig ook dat deelnemende navorsingsmetodes 'n waardevolle alternatiewe benadering is op die gebied van inligtingbehoeftenavorsing.

Trefwoorde: Deelnemende navorsing, Kwalitatiewe navorsing, Inligtingsbehoeftes, Kleurlinge, Vroue, Kleurlingvroue, Eersterust, Feministiese navorsing

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1   Purpose and scope of the study

The primary focus of research in this study is to investigate the practical applicability of participatory research methods in the area of information needs research.

The past two decades have seen a gradual move towards more user-centred approaches in information needs research and the increasing use of qualitative research methods for the identification of information needs. Participatory research, as an exemplary qualitative research methodology, could demonstrate practically this paradigm shift towards the use of qualitative methodologies.

The first part of the study will give an overview of the development of participatory research, and a discussion of the characteristics, pre-requisites and practical techniques for the application of the methodology. This will be followed by a discussion on information needs and information needs studies. In a similar vein a review of the target group chosen for the research project will be given. The practical implementation of the research project, an assessment of the process, evaluation of the results, and recommendations for further research and programmes will complete the study.

1.2   Background to the research area

This study endeavours to bring about a unique marriage of participatory research, a methodology generally applied in areas such as development,

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communication, agriculture and health, with research on information needs, traditionally seen as belonging to the discipline of Information Science.

1.2.1   Participatory research methods

During the 1950's and 1960's development thinkers believed that the problem of underdevelopment could be solved by the mechanical implementation of the economic and political systems of the West in the countries in the Third World (Servaes, 1999: 5). Because this "modernisation" and development was centrally planned without any consultation with the people involved, wrong solutions and failed projects were invariably the result.

In the early 1970's, many people in the development community began questioning the top-down approach dominant in the previous decades. This reaction gave birth to the implementation of approaches of a more participatory nature. Well-intended non-participatory development projects attempted to do everything possible *for* the people, whereas participatory development projects were executed *by* the people (Servaes, 1996(c): 82).

This new way of thinking resulted in a combination of concepts brought together under the term participatory research, stimulating people involved in development work in various parts of the world to begin working along similar lines (Hall, 1984: 290).

The participatory research technique was first brought to international recognition in 1972 (Anyanwu, 1988: 12) when Paolo Freire, within the context of his work with adult literacy programmes, coined the term "conscientisation". Freire believes that people who have lived their lives in marginalised and deprived positions need to develop a critical insight into the structures and ideas in society and themselves that place and maintain them

in positions of inequality. By developing a "critical consciousness" (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 6) they can then develop their own initiatives to change their situation. Freire was adamant that positive results could not be expected from research programmes that correspond to the view of the planners, but fail to respect the view of the world held by the people.

The methodologies of participatory research thus became critical in the developmental process itself, and became an important way to operationalise the concept of participation.

Participatory research operates from the basic premise that every human being has worth and should be treated with respect regardless of that person's status in society (Servaes, 1999: 110). It is a qualitative research methodology whereby people themselves have a voice in studying themselves and their situations (White, 1994: 21). One of the unique qualities of participatory research is that it serves the interest of both the researcher and the researched. By sharing the process, not only are people's needs and perspectives documented, but knowledge production by the people themselves is emphasised, resulting in increased self-confidence and pride in their contributions.

1.2.2   Information needs research

Information is fundamental to our existence and is used in a variety of contexts – as a commodity, as energy, as communication, as facts, as data, as knowledge (Prasad, 1992: 3). The need for information could arise from the desire to fulfil physiological, psychological or cognitive needs (Wilson, 1981: 7). Such needs could be expressed or unexpressed (dormant), present or immediate, or even future, deferred or potential needs.

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Practical ways of identifying the need for information is, however, a complex process. Not only is there a difficulty in conceptualising the term information needs - definitions are more often than not vague or highly complex - but there is also the difficulty of separating the concept from related terms such as want, expressed demand, requirements, satisfied demand, and so forth.

The subject of suitable techniques for determining information needs keeps recurring in the literature (Van Lill, 1999: 4). Information needs have generally been studied using methods developed in the social sciences and, as in the social sciences, most of these techniques were of a quantitative nature (Rhode, 1986: 55). Over the last two or three decades these positivistic approaches were challenged as they were seen as producing one-dimensional research unable to cope with complex and dynamic social realities (Servaes, 1999: 103). In the information needs research area researchers also moved away from the use of purely quantitative research methods towards a more user-centred, qualitative approach (Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan, 1982; Dervin & Nilan, 1986; Streatfield, 1983; Swift, Winn & Bramer, 1979; Wilson, 1981; 1994). Qualitative research methods are most suitable for the study of information needs as they are concerned with discovering the facts of the everyday lives of people, and thereby providing an understanding of the meaning of information in the lives of the people (Wilson, 1981: 11).

1.3   Motivation for using a participatory approach to information needs studies

Three areas of thought influenced the decision to approach the study of information needs from a participatory research perspective. They are discussed below.

1.3.1   Participatory research as an alternative research method

According to Wilson (1999: 250) researchers in the field of information science generally seem to have ignored allied work in related social science areas that could offer robust theoretical models for the study of human behaviour. It is envisaged in this project that participatory research could offer such an alternative research model for the study of information needs.

Participatory research actively involves the subjects of research, and offers a way for researchers and people to join in the search for solutions to problems. This participation allows people to take part in projects that serve their unique individual aspirations and needs. These characteristics of participatory research as seen in the light of general developments towards the use of more qualitative research methods and the move towards a person-centred approach in information needs research, could themselves be sufficient motivation for this study.

1.3.2   The application of participatory research methods in other fields of research

The theory and practice of participatory research has its roots in development, but is also promoted in other fields and disciplines. Observations made by Servaes (1999) that participatory communication and research may hold interest for those outside the field of development, serves as further justification for assessing information needs from a participatory angle. Several other authors agree with this opinion, recognising that it might not always be necessary to institutionalise participatory processes by means of traditional developmental organisations (Richardson, 1997); that the benefits of the participatory experience need not be restricted to the poor and illiterate only (Martin, 1996); and that participatory research may offer a radical alternative to knowledge production in the social sciences (White,

1994). These opinions can certainly be applied to the field of information science and the study of information needs as well.

1.3.3   The suitability of participatory research methods for the chosen area of research

In reviewing the literature on information needs studies conducted with formerly disadvantaged sectors of South African society, it becomes clear that these studies have concentrated mainly on the black urban and rural sector. The dearth of studies concerning the Coloureds in South Africa is conspicuous. Very little material is available dealing with the information needs of women. It is furthermore apparent that, although some exceptions venturing into the critical incident technique and observation do occur, the use of traditional quantitative techniques such as questionnaires and interviews, are still the norm in these studies.

Participatory research is not an unknown concept in South Africa and has much to offer (Ramphele, 1990: 1). The participatory model, as a method for determining the information needs of Coloured women, offers a viable alternative research paradigm for this South African study. The use furthermore of this qualitative research method would contribute to bringing information needs studies in South Africa more in line with recent developments in international research.

1.4   Statement of the problem and aims of the study

In the light of the above, the problem chosen to be addressed in this study is to explore, by way of practical implementation, the feasibility of using a participatory research approach as a method for determining the information

needs of a group of women belonging to a prayer group in the Coloured community of Eersterust, near Pretoria.

The aim of the study is twofold:

- **Firstly**, by measuring the course/progress of the research project against the prerequisites set for participatory research, to ascertain whether the project sufficiently conforms to these requirements

- **Secondly**, by using the basic principles and suggested phases of the participatory research process – collaboration and dialogue, people setting agendas, participating in data gathering, controlling the use of outcomes - to test whether success can be achieved in the application of the methodology for obtaining the expected results, i.e. identification of information needs

The emphasis in participatory research is on knowledge creation from the perspectives of both the researcher and the researched. Thus, although not stated here as a formal goal of the research project, it is foreseen that by actively engaging the group of women in a process of exploring and representing what they know, they will come to the realisation that they are capable, by using their own knowledge, of interpreting situations themselves and finding their own solutions to problems.

1.5   Research methodology

1.5.1   Choice of methodology and area of research

Participatory research presented, to this researcher, an unknown and exciting area of research to explore. Methods and methodology should not

be seen as simple techniques and rationales for the conduct of research - they must rather be understood in relation to specific cultural, ideological and other contexts (Reinharz, 1983: 162). To a researcher leaning strongly towards the social sciences, the opportunity to use qualitative methods in information needs research by means of a participatory research project in South Africa, was a stimulating challenge.

Arnst (1996: 114) is of the opinion that the questions we ask in research reflect our priorities, values and our concerns. Conducting research in which the perspective of women's experiences, ideas and needs play a central role, was a personal choice and pre-requisite for this researcher in deciding on a possible research project. In reviewing the literature on participatory research, it was intriguing to note how successfully these methods were applied in the area of feminist research. Further reading showed that feminist research and participatory research had many elements in common. Although this study is by no means a feminist study, the use of two methodologies with so many overlapping premises corresponded, in the words of Small (1988: 85), "both to an intellectual and gut reaction" in the researcher.

1.5.2   Research design and process

Qualitative research design differs inherently from quantitative design in that it usually does not provide the researcher with a step-by-step plan to follow (Schurink, 1998(b): 252). When discussing the implementation of a participatory project, it is important to note that, in contrast to the linear model of research (Cornwall, 1996: 94), participatory research methods emphasise the processes rather than the products of research. Participatory research is a cyclical, ongoing process of research, reflection and action. It is therefore not always possible to describe definite demarcated and successive steps in

the research process. Reason (1994(a): 48) is of the opinion that it is easier to describe the ideology of the participatory process than its methodology.

However, in this study, the following was incorporated:

- An in-depth *literature survey* was undertaken with the aim of providing sufficient theoretical knowledge of the demarcated area of study. Because the participatory research process constitutes the core of this research project, the literature study was also essential to understanding the processes involved in conducting the empirical project

- With the subjects of the research playing a central role in the process, the course of the *empirical phase* was determined by the specific place, situation, time and most importantly, the subjects' interpretation of how they saw themselves and the research they were inherently part of. Therefore reflection, action and further reflection and some adaptations to the process, were the main components of this research project

- *Evaluation* of the process was done. With the main thrust of this study being the application of participatory research itself, it was imperative that such application be measured against the criteria set for participatory research projects as reported in the literature. Information needs were evaluated by comparing information needs that were identified as a result of the project, with needs identified in other similar studies conducted in South Africa

1.5.3   Data collection methods

Various methods of data collection can be used for a research project. Survey techniques such as questionnaires, structured interviews and checklists providing easily quantifiable data, are most commonly used in

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quantitative research (De Vos, Schurink & Strydom, 1998: 8; Rhode, 1986: 55; Van Lill, 1999: 120). Research techniques requiring personal interaction such as participant observation, in-depth face-to-face interviews, focus groups, task analysis and critical incident techniques are more relevant to a qualitative approach (Aboyade, 1984; De Vos & Fouche, 1998: 90; Rhode, 1986: 55; Van Lill, 1999: 4). In qualitative research the researcher generally chooses the techniques and research design best suited to the project (Schurink, 1998(b): 252). Participatory research literature emphasises the impossibility of constructing a generalised participatory research model or the implementation of fixed or purist techniques (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b); Maguire, 1987; Tandon, 1988).

At the prayer meetings attended by the women in the group with whom the research was undertaken, communication takes place by means of group discussions and interactive prayer. The unstructured discussions in an informal group as followed in this study, was thus a natural and suitable choice of data collection method, determined by this research environment.

From studies described in the literature it seemed initially as if data recording could effectively be done by taking notes during the meetings, and immediately afterwards writing a process account of the discussions. As it turned out, however, the participants took the responsibility for data recording on themselves by appointing one of the women in the group to make notes, and afterwards consolidating the information for discussion at the next meeting.

Participatory research aims to explore subjectively the subjects' reality from their own perspective. It was therefore important that the methodology for data collection and data recording emerge naturally from the prevailing circumstances, as did happen in this study.

1.5.4   Organising the research project

The basic tenet of the participatory research method can be summarised as: equity and active involvement of the subjects taking part in the research process; resulting in knowledge generation and the development of critical awareness; leading to identification of needs and priorities, empowerment, self confidence, decision-making and problem-solving.

This project was conducted broadly according to the phases described below (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b); Freire, 1995; Maguire, 1987; Reason, 1994(b); Yoon, 1999).

1.5.4.1   *Planning the project*

The project was undertaken with a group of women belonging to a prayer group in the Coloured community of Eersterust, near Pretoria. In the process of searching for possible subjects with whom to undertake a participatory research project, the researcher's study leader suggested that women in the Eersterust community be approached. She was already involved in some development projects in the community and not only knew many people there, but also had a co-operative and trusting relationship with the members of the community in which she worked. This greatly facilitated the entrance into the community.

1.5.4.2   *Entering the community*

As part of this phase of the research project, the researcher accompanied her colleague to a committee meeting at a nursery school that formed part of the development project underway in the community, in order to state her research needs. At this meeting the involvement of a group of women belonging to a prayer group was offered.

After a subsequent meeting with the women in the prayer group, they indicated their willingness to be part of the research project, and the researcher started going to regular meetings.

Although the project was set by the researcher's interest/area of research, it was not executed according to her agenda, which meant that the decision as to who would take part in the research project, and how it was to be conducted, depended solely on the women themselves.

1.5.4.3   *Practical execution of the research plan.*

Negotiation of the aims of the research is an integral component of participatory methodology. Once this had been decided by the group, the women took an active and informed part in establishing the directions of the research. The following are some of the decisions made by the participants in collaboration with the researcher: in what manner and when meetings would be conducted; how information would be collected; how data would be analysed; to whom findings should be disseminated; and how this should be done.

1.5.4.4   *Reflection and analysis of the process.*

The familiar informal format of the meetings, and the fact that the information needs identified were recorded by the women themselves, contributed to a continuous process of evaluation and deliberation. Discussions on the progress and outcomes of the research in the light of the experiences of the participants thus formed an essential part of the meetings. This resulted in modifications in the direction and execution of the project, initiated by the women, as the need arose.

1.5.4.5   Withdrawing from the community

The time allocated for the planned research was conveyed to the participants at the start of the project, and withdrawal took place gradually taking into consideration the emotional attachments that had been formed between the researcher and the women in the research group.

1.6   Limitations of the study

Due to circumstantial restrictions, by the conclusion of this project, some of the pre-requisites set for participatory research will not have been met.

- Participation should not be just a situation where local people work with a researcher for the latter's convenience. The need for an ongoing process after academics have completed their research and the integration of the outcomes of the study into existing services is stressed in participatory research literature (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b); Maguire, 1987; Servaes, 1999)

   The aim of this study was not to conduct a developmental project, but to investigate the applicability of the participatory research method outside the traditional development and communication fields. Investigating and planning a feasible plan for ongoing community action was therefore not possible within the aims and context of this research project

- Time is an essential component of the process of engaging in participatory research, and establishing full, authentic reciprocity (Reason, 1994(a): 42). An unlimited period for conducting the research is a "luxury" that the researcher, due to professional and study obligations, did not have. A compromise, but still keeping as strictly as

possible to the ideal of meaningful dialogue and co-operation, was made. This meant meeting the prayer group on alternate Tuesdays for a period of approximately 10 months. A longer period of research might have resulted in programmes in which the information needs of the participants and their community could have been addressed on a practical level

1.7   Value of the study

It was found that participatory research methods can be a valuable alternative those traditionally used in the area of information needs assessment.

- By critically examining and analysing the research process, valuable insight can be obtained especially in the light of possible suggestions for the integration of these methods in similar or related subject areas

- Reflections on the experiences, problems, failures, and possible successes encountered in the course of the project, can serve as encouragement and guidelines for other researchers planning to enter this arena

- This study aimed not to only identify and "list" the information needs of the women participating in the project, but attempted to facilitate the process of learning and knowledge creation. By being actively engaged in the project as co-researchers, these women were empowered to explore their own situations thereby validating them as knowledgeable, active subjects capable of interpreting and changing their situations themselves (Cornwall, 1996: 95)

- Although this study cannot be regarded as "developmental" in the true sense, the project, being conducted with a Coloured community in Eersterust, cannot be divorced from contemporary political and socio-economic circumstances in South-Africa. True human development requires at its core human interaction, the building and nurturing of relationships (Maguire, 1996: 35). Conventional models of research place the researcher in a dominant role, whereas participatory research brings research and action, and the researcher and participant, together in a different way. This people-centred approach could therefore, in a small way, bridge gaps and serve as an example and as a challenge to transform existing structures, relationships, practices and inequalities

1.8   Division of chapters

After the general introductory chapter, **Chapter Two** deals with the concept of participation. It provides an historical overview of participatory processes such as participatory development and participatory communication that gave rise to participatory research. Other qualitative methods related to participatory research are looked at, in contrast to quantitative research methods, and the advantages of the chosen methodology are given.

Chapter Three gives an in-depth discussion of the basic principles on which the methodology for the implementation of the participatory research process is based. An overview of applications of participatory research in various contexts is given, including participatory research projects in South Africa.

Chapter Four consists of an exposition of information needs and information needs studies. It includes the following: a description of the concepts of information and information needs, the categorisation of information needs,

the development of information needs studies and methodologies, and previous studies done on information needs assessment in South Africa. The use of information in developmental context and for decision making is covered. The chapter concludes with the possible application of participatory methods to information needs research.

Chapter Five looks at the political, economic and social history of Coloureds in South Africa. A discussion of the Eersterust community within its cultural, social and political milieu is followed by an overview of the background and everyday situations of the women in the prayer group with whom the project was undertaken. The role of women in South Africa is then explored. Issues relating to the question of the identity of both Coloureds in South Africa, as well as that of women, form part of these discussions. The relationship between participatory research and feminist research within the context of the research aims of this study concludes the chapter.

The aim of *Chapter Six* is to describe how this research project was designed and carried out. It contains the practical implementation of the participatory research process conducted according to various phases as suggested by various authors, and compares this research process with all its components and implementations, with general prerequisites set for participatory research projects. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information needs identified as a result of the project and a brief comparison with other information needs identified in other studies conducted in South Africa.

The concluding *Chapter Seven* gives a brief summary and evaluation of the results and contributions of the research undertaken. Recommendations for future areas of research form part of this chapter, as well as considerations for possible ongoing community programmes developing as a result of this research project.

CHAPTER 2

The development of participatory research as a research method

2.1   Introduction

The theory and practice of participatory research has its roots in development, but is increasingly being used in other fields. In order to provide a frame of reference for this study this chapter commences with a discussion of the concept of participation and associated concepts, followed by an historical overview of the development of participatory research. Against this background, the chapter concludes with a comparison of participatory research with traditional research and other related research strategies.

2.2   The concept of participation

Human beings have many needs, such as the need to eat, to drink, and to sleep, or the need to be educated, to work, to think and to express themselves. Bordenave (1994: 36) maintains that participation is also an essential human need. This idea is supported by Reason (1994(b): 15), affirming that participatory relationships are the very essence of human life. Accepting participation as a basic human need implies that participation is a human right (Bordenave, 1994: 47) and that it should be upheld and accepted for itself alone and for its results:

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> The right to belong to a group but be recognised as a unique person – appreciated and respected, to create and re-create our physical and cultural environments and to have a say in decisions affecting one's life (Bordenave, 1994: 36).

Participation, as used in developmental literature, suggests sharing in an activity or process that was traditionally organised and implemented in hierarchical or exclusive ways (Thomas, 1994: 49). People's participation has historically been the ideological basis for western democratic societies. It is also true that western civilisation or the so-called developed world has, according to Reason (1994(b): 14), been "sustained by the myth that it is at the peak of civilisation and the evolution of consciousness". In a changing era, however, the concept of participation is beginning to be appreciated in developing countries (Bordenave, 1996: 10). This allowed people to become architects of their own development and not merely objects of technology or "progress" - mirroring their own aspirations and needs, rather than those imposed on them by others (Thomas, 1994: 49). The traditionally accepted notion of the undeveloped being lifted up to the standards of the developed is fundamentally at odds with the principles of genuine participation (Arnst, 1996: 110). Participation of the people in projects where control and decision-making power rests with planners and administrators is "pseudo-participation" (White, 1994: 17). True participation can only come about when developmental planners and the people involved work together throughout the decision-making process, when genuine dialogue is takes place, and when people are empowered to control the action taken.

2.2.1   Definition of the term participation

General definitions of the term participation imply "to take part in, to become actively involved in" (Collins Paperback English Dictionary, 1994: 614). As an exponent of participatory research, Arnst (1996:109) is of the opinion that authentic participation defies strict definition, and that participation is a term

that has been distorted and overused. For the past decade or more, participation has, according to White (1994:16), been the "in" word and no respectable developmental project can be funded without provision for the "participation" of the people.

The notion of participation has been interpreted in many ways. Within the Western tradition, there is the widely held meaning of participation derived from democratic political theory, whereas in communist countries the idea of participation is derived from class analysis (Jacobson, 1996: 266). Although widely accepted models of participation appropriate for conditions in developing countries do not exist, participation, as operationalised in the context of Eastern Bloc countries, again differs from participation in the context of Third World development (White, 1994: 16).

Disagreements on what constitutes participation have abounded from the beginning and stemmed partly from differences of ideology and partly from the settings where work was attempted (Yoon, 1999). Many interpretations of the concept exist, and it is clear that use of the term is contextual and "kaleidoscopic" (White, 1994: 16), changing from one moment to the next. Authentic participation defines itself within each unique structural, social and cultural context (Arnst, 1996: 111).

When trying to construct a definition of the term in a developmental context, certain basic concepts emerge (MacDonald, 1986; Bordenave, 1994):

- Participation as a people's movement, as activities undertaken by people to assume greater control over their own life situations
- A dynamic society, built by all and belonging to all
- An organised framework - the need for structures facilitating participation
- Collective effort as the involvement of groups rather than individuals, a society where obvious needs are satisfied as well non-obvious requirements of love, recognition, sharing

- Objectives that are set by the people themselves; control acquired by those who were formerly powerless where people participate directly in the planning and management of all processes

2.2.2   Sub-concepts related to participation

From the descriptions and definitions of participation, it becomes clear that there are various interpretations and terms related to the concept. Some examples follow.

2.2.2.1   *Power and control*

The idea of generative *power and control* is consistent with and appropriate to the concept of participation (White, 1994: 23). According to many authors, Servaes (1999), Ayee (1993), White (1994), and MacDonald (1986), to name but a few, genuine participation directly addresses power and its distribution in society. Within the framework of development, participation means the strengthening of the power of the deprived majority (Ayee, 1993: 163) and the more equitable sharing of both political and economic power. Participation means sharing, not only of duties, but also of power and privileges (MacDonald, 1986: 87). Power and control are pivotal sub-concepts that contribute to understanding the diversity of expectations and anticipated outcomes of people's participation (White, 1994: 17).

2.2.2.2   *Liberation*

As people achieve the ability to determine the course of their own lives, the confidence gained in the process is in itself liberating. Authentic participation leads to a freeing; it is an emancipatory experience (Thomas, 1994: 51). Paolo Freire believes that the act of liberation involves the liberation of

human beings towards their historical vocation to be free (Thomas, 1994: 50).

2.2.2.3   Participation as a learning process

Participation can be interpreted as a *learning process.* People are given the opportunity to set their own goals and take their own decisions, awakening people's latent abilities by offering them choices to enable them to fully develop their potential (Ayee, 1993: 167). Paolo Freire's concept of "*conscientisation"* – to activate one's consciousness, one's identity, one's talents and one's alternatives - is central to the theme of participation (White, 1994: 24).

2.2.2.4   Self-reliance and self-confidence

Participation in and of itself is an act of *self-reliance,* accompanied by *self-confidence* (White, 1994: 25). Participation explicitly addresses the aim of developing esteem and self-confidence, providing a context for the recognition of people's knowledge and abilities, and this sense of self-confidence is in itself empowering. A community of self-reliant people will be capable of recognising their own problems and be confident in their ability to develop their own solutions.

2.2.2.5   Knowledge sharing.

Knowledge systems and the creation of knowledge have traditionally been the domain of the academic and well-educated (White, 1994: 26), but by setting the stage for *dialogue,* participation and the use of indigenous knowledge modified this position, and knowledge generation, acquisition and sharing became reciprocal processes.

2.2.2.6   Honesty, trust and commitment

Reciprocal collaboration brings about *honesty, trust and commitment* from both higher-ups as well as grassroots (Servaes, 1996(a): 17). Participation means to listen what others say, respecting the counterpart's attitude, and having mutual trust.

2.3   The historical development of participatory research

Participatory research has emerged from and has been influenced by movements that share a vision of society without dominance – movements questioning the processes and purposes of their respective fields. The emergence of participatory research can be linked mainly to **three trends** (Maguire, 1987: 31; Hall, 1984: 291):

- **Trends in development -** reconceptualisations of the principles of economic development

- **Re-formulating adult education** - the involvement of many adult educators and the subsequent re-formulation of adult education as an empowering alternative to traditional educational approaches

- **The Social Science debate** - an ongoing debate within the social sciences, criticising and challenging the dominant research methods

2.3.1   Trends in development

Scholars as well as policy-makers today look upon development as an ethical-political process of social change (Servaes, 1999: 14). Development is change and any intervention will implicitly or explicitly have far-reaching

consequences on the lives of the people involved in the process (Schoen, 1996: 249).

The modernisation and dependency theories in community development and the emergence of participatory communication paved the way for a new paradigm for development.

2.3.1.1   *The modernisation theory*

The roots of participatory approaches in development can be traced to the early 1970's when people in the development community started questioning the top-down approaches predominantly used in the 1950's and 1960's, which targeted economic growth of countries as the main goal (Agunga, 1996: 138; Yoon, 1999). Development officials worked from a strong technocratic approach to effect change based on their own assumptions concerning the choice of target groups, methods to use, and solutions to implement, with the aim of solving the problems of poverty, health, agriculture and so forth, prevalent in developing countries. With the help of foreign aid the rural backwater areas were "developed" by transferring technology and the socio-political culture of the developed societies to the "traditional" societies (Servaes, 1995: 40). Development was defined as economic growth. According to these modernisation theories, underdevelopment in Third World countries is caused by the absence of certain conditions present in technologically advanced societies; certain deficiencies within Third World countries are the major obstacles to their own development (Agunga, 1996: 140; Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993: 212). The difference in nations and peoples were measured "with arrogance" (Arnst, 1996: 113) in terms of technological and economic indicators rather than the fundamental values espoused by different societies (Servaes, 1995: 50).

Despite some successes measured in international terms, many research projects funded by First World countries had harmful consequences for local people (Robinson, 1999). This modernisation did not necessarily fit into the non-Western, traditional life of people in Third World countries. Coming from different social, economic and political systems, criteria of what was considered advantageous change differed between cultures. Development strategies developed in the West were not necessarily experienced as beneficial by the people being developed (Kellerman, 1988: 27; Kronenburg, 1986: 1).

The approach showed several weaknesses. The modernisation was centrally planned in urban centres under the guidance and direction of experts from developed countries without consulting the people concerned, often resulting in wrong solutions being imposed on these communities (Agunga, 1996: 146; Yoon, 1999: 2). Little space was provided for expression and constructive application of indigenous values, knowledge and skills (Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993: 213). The modernist perspective involved the idea of a population divided into "active" and "passive" participants, or "leaders" and "followers" (Servaes, 1996(b): 33) where recipients of programmes were unable to recognise their own social or economic ills or act on them. This lack of allowance for creative dialogue between the researcher and the beneficiaries of the programmes perpetuated the notion that Third World development could not rest in the hands of the indigenous people themselves (Kellerman, 1988: 27).

Developed countries were prescribing development whilst providing assistance (Rahim, 1994: 118), but as a result of concrete experiences of failed projects and policies, they started questioning their own prescriptions. Development had often not bettered conditions for the people – material, social or psychological (Agunga, 1996: 146; Arnst, 1996: 10), and fingers were pointed at the exploitation taking place, at the increased poverty

resulting from development programmes and the overall lack of attention given to human potential (White, 1994: 21). The idea of the people taking part in their own development and the possible benefits thereof gradually gained ground, with "sensitive and responsible" (Robinson, 1999) researchers working with local people to ensure that their objectives form the basis for development research undertakings.

2.3.1.2   Dependency theories

Although it is not possible to identify a single line of thought contributing to the pursuit of an alternative on Third World development, the search for a new perspective can in many ways also be tied to the ideas of dependency theorists (Kellerman, 1988: 32). Dependency critiques largely contributed to the discrediting of modernisation as a theoretical approach (Jacobson, 1996: 268). Critics of international development assistance observed that this type of assistance attacked the symptoms rather than the causes of poverty by ignoring the role of dependency (Maguire, 1987:32).

The "father" of the dependency theory was Paul Baran (Agunga, 1996: 148; Servaes, 1995: 41) who was the first to express the view that development and underdevelopment are interrelated processes. Where the modernisation perspective regards the causes of underdevelopment as lying within the developing nation itself, the dependency theory postulates that the reasons for underdevelopment are primarily external to the dependent society - that they are the result of international structures which undermine the capacities of ordinary people to engage in serious inquiry about problems and issues of daily concern to them. A further argument used by the dependency theorists is that the privileged elite in Third World countries work together with the First World suppliers of capital in such ways that independent development is prevented (Agunga, 1996: 147; Servaes, 1995: 45).

One of the most important contributions made by the dependency theorists was that democratisation processes should be encouraged in Third World countries. The emphasis placed on increased consciousness and empowerment played an important part in the establishment of participatory development thought (Kellerman, 1988: 34).

2.3.1.3   *Participatory communication*

In the same way as developers in the modernisation era, communicators responded to the shift towards participation in development by echoing the new approaches in their work (Yoon, 1999) and participatory communication was born.

The term participatory communication is used to describe

> … processes of two-way communication that encourage dialogue centred on problem-analysis, people communicating with one another to search for solutions for their problems, and bottom-up communication that raises the awareness of decision-makers to those problems (Bessette, as quoted in Richardson, 1997).

It means people's involvement in all stages of a communication development project, and stands in direct contrast with practices where the emphasis is on projects implemented with outside help and in which the beneficiaries are merely passive receivers of the finished product (Thomas, 1994: 54).

One can readily conclude that participation is not possible without communication. Communication is fundamentally a social action – the articulation of social relations between people (Servaes, 1999: 13). Participatory communication helps establish dialogue and interaction among people (Richardson, 1997) and is, under ideal circumstances, the by-product of participatory processes and practised spontaneously in participatory communities (Yoon, 1999).

True participatory communication is not easy to achieve (Bordenave, 1996:11), but in the words of White (1994: 20):

> Participatory communication seems to be the most promising approach for decreasing dependency, building self-confidence and self-reliance of the people and for transforming indigenous knowledge and heritage into modern-day solutions for development problems…

Participatory communication can reduce the possibilities of conflict, not only between groups and communities, but also between nations – both powerful and powerless (Nair & White, 1994: 168).

2.3.1.4   A new paradigm

From the above discussion it becomes clear that "the meaning and values of development" (Rahim, 1994: 118) should be produced by the people where the development is taking place. We have also seen in the literature that mainly two paradigms on communication and development prevail, namely modernisation and growth versus dependency and underdevelopment. Servaes (1999), however, argues in favour of a third paradigm which he has termed "multiplicity in one world" – a multiplicity paradigm. The central idea in this paradigm is that there is no universal path to development (Servaes, 1999: 3) and that development should be defined as need-oriented, endogenous, self-reliant and based on participatory and structural transformation (Agunga, 1996: 162). This argument points the way to a theory of sharing of information, knowledge, trust, and commitment in development projects. The central role of the cultural identity of local communities should be emphasised, and empowerment, democratisation, and participation encouraged at all levels (Malan, 1998(a): 50). By focusing on participatory involvement of the people, "another world" (Schoen, 1996: 250) is opened in which communities can determine the course of their own

lives, concentrating on their unique needs, developing solutions, and making changes of their own choice.

2.3.2　Re-formulating adult education

2.3.2.1　Background

Education has played an important role in the development of the concept of participatory research (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 5). During the same time that the changes in developmental thinking were taking place, adult educators, both in the Third World and in the West, were also questioning traditional practices (Maguire, 1987: 33).

The term participatory research or "participatory education" (De Souza, 1988: 31), originated with adult educators in the South, particularly Latin America (Tandon, 1988: 5). Because of the nature of adult education practice, it has always been a rich source for ideas, methods and strategies that have application to larger social movements (Hall, 1984: 290). Adult education is built on the philosophy and techniques that treat adult learners as whole people, placing learners in the centre with control over their own learning process (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 5). Educators were, however, confronted with the contradiction between this philosophy and their research practice where learners were being treated as passive objects in the research process. Neither the research, nor the analysis, nor the use of the results, was based on the direct involvement of the people concerned or produced any tangible or direct benefit for the people (Hall, 1984: 291).

2.3.2.2　The role of Paolo Freire

Adult educators in many parts of the world, in their re-evaluation of customary educational practices, were inspired by the writings of Paolo

Freire. Entire generations of researchers and activists involved in participatory development projects all over the world have also been influenced by his writings (Thomas, 1994: 51).

Freire's philosophy of education and his ideas on participation are based on the principle that people are meant to be free from material and psychological oppression, free from patterns of life imposed by others that do not provide for the involvement of people in the process of change (Thomas, 1994: 51). His pedagogy evolved from his encounter with poverty, exploitation and domesticated development in north-east Brazil (Thomas, 1994: 50). Freire asserts that most educational activities do not challenge the inequalities in learners' lives, but keeps them passive and uncritical (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 6). In his writings participation is the key concept – the fundamental right of everyone to participation and emancipation regarding the political, economic, social and cultural (Servaes, 1996(a): 17).

Freire's ideas embrace the following:

- **_Dialogue._** Freire refers to the right of people to "individually and collectively speak their mind" (Freire, 1995: 69). He is of the opinion that dialogue is the way in which people achieve significance as human beings. It is therefore an existential necessity (Freire, 1995: 69). Dialogue, however, cannot take place between disparates – between "those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (Freire, 1995: 69). A commitment based on mutuality and respect is thus presupposed (Thomas, 1994: 52). Dialogue requires love for the world and for the people, humility, and faith in humankind and cannot exist without hope. "If dialoguers expect nothing to come from their efforts their encounter will be empty" (Freire, 1995: 73).

- ***Involvement of the people****.* Positive results cannot be expected from programmes that fail to take into consideration the view of the world held by the people. This view of their world is manifested in their actions and reflects their situation in the world (Freire, 1995: 77). Planning programmes from the top-down reflect the view of the world as held by the planners but not that of the people. Humans exist in their own worlds which they are constantly re-creating and transforming (Freire, 1995: 80) and their contribution to changing their own situations in educational and development projects should stand to reason.

- ***Conscientisation.*** Freire emphasised the development of critical consciousness, the act of reflection where people are introduced to a critical form of thinking about their world, as a vital element in participatory development and education (Maguire, 1987: 33). Men and women meet with personal obstacles in their lives. Freire calls these obstructions or barriers "limit situations" (Freire, 1995: 83). People who live their lives in marginalised and deprived positions need to develop a critical insight into these "limit situations". Once there has been a critical perception of the situation, people feel themselves challenged to solve the problems of the society in which they live in the best possible manner, and in an atmosphere of hope and confidence (Freire, 1995: 206). A critical analysis makes possible a new, critical attitude towards the limit-situation. "Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence" (Freire, 1995: 90). Freire believes that all individuals have this capacity for reflection, abstract thinking, for conceptualising, taking decisions, choosing alternatives and planning social change – the ability to surmount the limit situations in order to achieve "humanisation" (Freire, 1995: 84). Action and reflection are not separate activities, but an organic whole and it is this interplay between action and reflection that constitutes the process of conscientisation (Thomas, 1994: 51).

Participatory research, as visualised by Freire, becomes one mode of a continuous process of learning (Cornwall, 1996: 94). Doing is reflected upon, raising more questions, which in turn create further possibilities for action. In this way researchers and participants develop a critical awareness of circumstances influencing their lives, reflect on those circumstances, and decide what action would be the most important and feasible to take (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 5).

2.3.3   The Social Science debate

2.3.3.1   Introduction

Research is the process by which new knowledge is created. Research influences the direction in which an academic field moves (Conti, 2000). Every aspect of our work is influenced by the particular paradigms out of which we choose to operate (Maguire, 1987: 27). This world view shapes what we look at, how we look at things, what we label as problems, what problems we consider worth investigating and solving, and what methods we prefer for investigation (Maguire, 1987: 11).

Social science research methodology has traditionally been biased strongly in favour of quantitative approaches. Much of the motivation for this came from a strongly held view that the social sciences should emulate the most advanced of the natural sciences (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997: 42). However, in the opinion of Whyte (1991: 19), no scientific logic demands unilateral commitment to one kind of research method, as reliance on a narrow theoretical and methodological base deprives the field of vitality and challenges. Researchers are in a most dangerous position when there is blind and tacit acceptance of any paradigm without conscious and critical exploration of possible choices involved (Maguire, 1987: 27).

In the social sciences research paradigms influence the ways in which society is investigated and the research approach used by the majority of academics throughout history in pursuit of scientific knowledge is increasingly being criticised (Ramphele, 1990: 2). By "mimicking the methodologies of hard science" (Arnst, 1996: 115), the social sciences were distanced from the social context which they professed to try and understand. Social scientists became increasingly frustrated and disenchanted with research that alleged to produce knowledge about people and social conditions while using methods which distorted the very reality (Hall, 1984: 290). It was felt that detachment, the reluctance to influence research results with subjectivity, whilst claiming to be working for the benefit of the people being studied, should be challenged (Arnst, 1996: 116). The dissatisfaction experienced by development workers and adult educators, as discussed previously, can be regarded as part of the ongoing debate within the social sciences, where some social philosophies have tried to come to terms with the fact that the members of society being investigated "live within a world which has sense and meaning for themselves" (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997: 140).

2.3.3.2   *Quantitative research methods*

The dominant "traditional" or "mainstream" approach to research, regarded by many social scientists as the only legitimate way of creating knowledge (Maguire, 1987: 9), is grounded in positivism. These quantitative approaches start from the assumption that all knowledge is based on observable reality, and that social phenomena can be studied on the basis of methodologies and techniques adopted from the natural sciences. Social scientists concluded that, by applying these methods to the study of human affairs, it would be possible to predict and ultimately to control human social behaviour (Servaes, 1999: 95).

Positivism is the view that recognises only positive facts and observable objective phenomena. It proceeds from the supposition that reality really exists and that, apart from the human interpretation of it, observable reality is uniform, can be objectively understood, predicted and controlled (Arnst, 1996: 113). The purpose of this type of research is to test hypotheses that have been developed before the research project has started and to form conclusions that can be generalised to other situations. The approach is highly formalised as well as explicitly controlled with the emphasis on measurement, comparison and objectivity (Conti, 2000; De Vos, Schurink & Strydom, 1998: 15).

Using the traditional positivist approach, scientific research is an empirical pursuit with its basis in the observation of data which are not the result of judgement, interpretation or other subjective mental operation (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997: 43). Studying the behaviour of people under controllable conditions in order to obtain verifiable empirical data implies that man has no freedom of choice, that he is a product of circumstances beyond his control (Kronenburg, 1986: 252). The unconditional acceptance of this form of research cuts the social scientist off from serious consideration of alternative assumptions and approaches to the production of social knowledge (Maguire, 1987: 9).

2.3.3.3   *Qualitative research*

Quantitative as well as qualitative researchers increasingly recognise the weakness of a purely objectivist position (Servaes, 1999: 96). Qualitative research accepts subjectivity as a given, relying on the interpreted, inter-subjective and human nature of reality. In qualitative research, which is quite the opposite of neutrality and detachment, the goal is a search for subjective understanding, rather than a quest for prediction and control (Arnst, 1996:117). Qualitative researchers thus have different perspectives from

those of quantitative researchers based on their world-view of what scientific truth entails (Schurink, 1998(a): 240). Qualitative research is based on the assumption that multiple realities exist in people's perception of the world and in order to understand these phenomena information from a wide variety of sources must be sought and combined in a meaningful way (Conti, 2000). It follows the premise that human beings are not objects, and therefore strives for subjective understanding rather than manipulation of human behaviour and thereby, according to Servaes (1999: 106), "restoring the critical and liberating function to social investigation".

2.3.3.4   Research involving participation

Although qualitative research approaches are more organic and human, the question of why research should not also have a directly articulated social purpose (Arnst, 1996: 118) was increasingly being asked. Participatory research arose from a thorough questioning in the field of social research, succeeding in breaking with the practice of conventional accepted methods (Anyanwu, 1988: 15). Long before the term became popular, social anthropologists and sociologists were carrying out projects that fit under the label of participatory research (Whyte, 1991: 9). Notwithstanding, participatory methods are still referred to as "alternative research paradigms" by many authors of contemporary participatory literature. Botha (1994: 71), however, is of the opinion that this is a contradictory title as, once an approach becomes firmly established, as participation is, it ceases to be "alternative" but forms part of the mainstream.

Reason (1994(b)) uses the term "human inquiry" to encompass all those forms of research which aim to move beyond a narrow, positivistic and materialistic world-view. Human inquiry practitioners assert that one can only truly do research with persons if we engage with them as persons, as co-subjects and thus as co-researchers (Reason, 1994(b): 10). For the

participatory researcher the guiding principle is the interest and priority of the participants, who traditionally were subjects of research (Kronenburg, 1986: 255). The determinants of participation in participatory research (Tandon, 1988: 13) are the people's/subjects' role in setting the agenda of inquiry, participation in data collection and analysis, and control over the use of outcomes and the whole process.

Participatory research is a social research approach originally set mainly in the context of development (Servaes, 1996(c): 97) and it is important to distinguish true participatory research from other similar types of research such as the following:

- *Participant observation* is one of the major research techniques used by many anthropologists and sociologists to collect data in the field (Preston-Whyte & Dalrymple, 1996: 117). The participant observer rejects the notion that reliable observation can only be obtained from unobserved study of human behaviour under controlled conditions (Kronenburg, 1986: 253), but rather believes that human behaviour is influenced in many ways by the milieu or setting in which it occurs (Schurink, 1998(c): 280). As a research method participant observation enables researchers to spend considerable time in their subject's natural habitat obtaining first-hand data through participating in as much of the actual day-to-day life experiences of those being researched (Ramphele, 1990: 2; Schurink, 1998(c): 280)

- *Action research* demands from the social scientist conscious commitment to the aspirations of the people studied and an attempt to look at things from their perspective without neglecting scientific rigour in data collection and interpretation (Kronenburg, 1986: 5). However, it can be, and often is, related to top-down development (Arnst, 1996: 120) and was seen as a means of arriving at pre-formulated goals regarded by

many as manipulative (Kronenburg, 1986: 254). Dissociation followed with the emergence of a research method initiated by Orlando Fals Borda that involved investigating reality in order to transform it, namely Participatory Action Research (De Souza, 1988: 29)

- **_Participatory Action Research_** involves some of the people in an organisation or community under study in the research process from the initial design through to the final conclusion. People involved in the situation are actively engaged in the quest for information and ideas to address and solve their problems, and guide their future action (Whyte, 1991: 20). Participatory Action Research aims to develop an alternative system of knowledge production with the people setting the agendas, participating in data gathering and analysis, and controlling the use of outcomes. It places emphasis on the processes of collaboration and dialogue that empower, motivate, increase self-esteem and develop community solidarity (Reason, 1994(a): 48). The principles and aims are virtually indistinguishable from those of participatory research and the terms are often used interchangeably in the literature

- **_Co-operative inquiry_** used by Reason (1994(a)) is another term closely related to participatory research. It is based on the assumption that persons are self-determining, having the potential to be the cause of their own actions. The term was first presented by John Herron in 1971 and extended and developed over the years (Reason, 1994(a): 41). The assumption is that one can only do research with persons in the fullest sense if what they do and experience as part of the research is to some significant degree directed by them. This means that all involved in research are both co-researchers and co-subjects, participating with awareness in the activity that is being researched (Reason, 1994(a): 41)

2.4   Summary

From the discussions in this chapter it is clear that three main trends have converged to contribute to the emergence of the concept of participation and the practice of participatory research:

- The debate on the development paradigm raised the question of participation as a critical variable (Tandon, 1996: 21) – people's participation, women's participation, community participation

- The second trend came from adult educators from whom evolved a methodology of learning and education which helped establish the control of the learner over his or her own learning process (Tandon, 1996: 20)

- Within the social science research fraternity came various new directions. Action research can be regarded as the most influential concept here (Kronenburg, 1986: 253). Action research challenged the myth of a static notion of research and inquiry (Tandon, 1996: 22) arguing for acting as a basis for learning and knowing

The early writing on participatory research began in the late 1970's and its methodologies have grown out of the need for research findings to be more relevant to people's needs (Nair & White, 1994: 167; Tandon, 1988: 11). It is a view that is important, both for the advancement of science and for the improvement of human welfare (Whyte, 1991: 9).

Its principles are based on the active involvement of the people who may benefit or whose lives may be affected by the research outcomes. The approach encourages dialogue and respect for the dignity and personhood of every human being regardless of their status in society, and thereby serves

as one of the instruments that contribute to the process of "enabling the humanisation of human beings" (De Souza, 1988: 34).

The resulting participatory approaches and methodologies of participatory research have paved the way for the effective application of the concept of participation. For the purposes of this study (in which the participatory approach is to be applied with the aim of investigating the viability of its practical implementation), it was necessary to follow specific strategies or procedures. In order to be able to do so, knowledge and background of the methodology, techniques and application possibilities, was necessary. These will be explored in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER 3

The process of participatory research

3.1 Introduction

Participation of the people, as was discussed in the previous chapter, is the central element of participatory research. Participatory research is research "with" rather than research "for" or "on" people (Servaes, 1999: 111). It involves the people themselves as researchers and offers a way for researchers and people to join in the search for solutions to everyday problems and for radical social change (Van Rooyen & Gray, 1995: 89).

The work in this chapter serves primarily as background for the implementation of the practical project expounded in Chapter Six. The chapter presents an overview of the principles and practical issues and processes involved in conducting a participatory research project – the characteristics and aims of participatory research, evaluation of research results, and the phases according to which a project is executed. Specific examples of projects implemented in diverse research areas conclude the chapter.

3.2 Characteristics of participatory research

Although it becomes clear that many different interpretations of the concept exists, a number of common characteristics can be identified when studying the literature concerning the participatory research process:

3.2.1   Adults are capable

The main principle underlying the philosophy of participatory research is the assumption that adults are capable – capable of learning, of changing, of acting, of transforming their world (Tandon, 1988: 5). The tenet is that people are capable because research is conducted in their immediate context (Arnst, 1996: 119). Underlying this "democratisation of research" (Maguire, 1987: 39) is a deep and abiding belief in people's capacity to grow and change.

3.2.2   Knowledge creation

Participatory research furthermore rests on the assumption that human beings have an innate ability to create knowledge (Kronenburg, 1986: 155). Participatory research recognises the need for the input of expertise and contribution of special skills (Tandon, 1988: 7), but does not dismiss popular knowledge and indigenous knowledge production. Knowledge and the production of knowledge in the western world has become a lucrative business (Maguire, 1987: 36), but ordinary people are often not considered knowledgeable or capable of knowing, even within their own worlds. Participatory research challenges the notion that only professional researchers can generate knowledge (Servaes, 1999: 111). It assumes that communities have traditional, well-established knowledge systems which have allowed them to survive over the years and that these knowledge bases should be tapped (Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993: 214). "People's power", according to Fals Borda (1985: 86), is this potential capacity of people to articulate and systemise knowledge in such a way that they can become leaders in the advancement of their own society. Close co-operation between researcher and community makes for respect of the people's capability to produce knowledge (Anayanwu, 1988: 15), as well as for their power to analyse and utilise it.

3.2.3   Participatory research as an educational process.

Participatory research is seen as an educational process for the participants in the programme as well as for the researcher (Kronenburg, 1986: 255). The educational component is potentially liberating as it provides people with a way of developing a critical understanding of their problems and the possibilities of overcoming them (Maguire, 1987: 30). The interaction between researcher and participants fosters a pedagogical environment in which the roles of the educator and the educated are constantly reversed (Servaes, 1999: 112). This encourages an atmosphere in which participants get to know themselves better, and requires that both the researcher and the researched be open to personal transformation (Maguire, 1987: 38). Everybody is teacher and student at the same time, and everybody has something of interest to share (Servaes, 1996(b): 100). Participatory research requires an attitude of mutuality, an openness and a commitment to learning on the part of all involved (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 11)

3.2.4   Commitment of the researcher

In the participatory research process the researcher is consciously committed to the cause of the community involved in the research. This challenges the traditional principle of scientific neutrality and the dichotomy of subject and object (Tandon, 1996: 20). The researcher is regarded as a person with specialised knowledge, but also as a person with a definite subjective commitment as he or she endeavours to identify with the people in order to understand their situation and contribute to the solution of their problems (Anyanwu, 1988: 15).

3.2.5   The process of dialogue

Research is based on a dialectic process of dialogue between the researcher and the community involved. Investigation becomes a common striving toward awareness of reality and self-awareness (Servaes, 1999: 112) - a co-operative enquiry by both the researcher and the people who are the focus of the study (Ramphele, 1990: 2). As a result of continuous dialogue and discussion among the research participants in all stages of research they become participatory social actors (Anayanwu, 1988:15), seeking to combine their critical insight and knowledge to generate awareness of the problems inhibiting the social progress of the community.

3.2.5   Participatory research as a problem-solving approach

Participatory research is a problem-solving approach aimed at uncovering the causes of community problems and finding ways of solving them. Because the research approach is problem-centred, the techniques that are used are harnessed to endeavour actively to understand the conditions underlying community problems with the aim of finding lasting solutions to those problems (Anyanwu, 1988: 15)

3.2.6   Ongoing action

Participatory research is a process of ongoing action. The intent of participatory research is not latent awareness (Servaes, 1999: 112).

> The aims of this special combination of knowledge and power within a continuous process of life and work are to enable the people to acquire sufficient creative and transforming leverage as expressed in specific projects, acts and struggles (Fals Borda, 1985: 86).

Relevant knowledge is derived from concrete situations of the people and leads to an exploration of possible goals and to action. This link between action and research is, according to Maguire (1987: 29), perhaps one of the most unique aspects of participatory research.

3.3   Evaluation in participatory research

As in the case of all research, basic questions such as on what grounds should the results of research be accepted?, what makes the research worth recognition?, and was the research successful?, could also be asked of participatory research projects (Servaes, 1999: 117).

Validity, reliability and objectivity are basic principles on which the evaluation of traditional research projects rests. Tandon (1988: 7) is of the opinion that it is irrelevant to get into any debate over issues such as objectivity and validity when evaluating participatory research projects as participatory research is an opposite shift in understanding of what research is.

However, any research method and/or project, including that of participatory research, must meet certain conditions and fulfil the requirements of scientific and philosophical knowledge when it is carried out (De Souza, 1988: 33). Participatory research approaches raise important questions regarding objectivity and "value-free" research (Nair & White, 1994: 168). Although few people who are directly in touch with the participatory research concept question the possibility of obtaining valid and reliable data, the debate about validity and reliability of qualitative data has developed substantially over the last decade or more (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 2).

3.3.1   The question of objectivity

Objectivity in quantitative research requires that the researcher remains neutral in order to prevent the "contamination" of involvement with the conditions of subjects' lives and circumstances - that researchers remain distant and detached from the subject and the people under investigation. Qualitative research on the other hand, is concerned with the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider as opposed to this outsider perspective (Schurink, 1998(a): 243).   Participatory researchers, *inter alia* Maguire (1987: 20), have definite problems with the premise of objective observation and measurement, as they hold the conviction that without close and empathic interpersonal relationships researchers will find it impossible to gain meaningful insight into human interaction.

Servaes rejects the assumption of pure objectivity in any research on the grounds that the underlying problem is

> … in assuming that the meanings for the conditions of the subjects' lives are independent of those subjects, researchers… are assuming that they themselves are independent of how they see the phenomena they are examining" (Servaes, 1999: 100).

Such researchers therefore accept the premise that it is possible to separate their own beliefs and values from their research work.

This brings to the fore the argument that not only could quantitative research outcomes be influenced by the circumstances in which research is taking place, but researchers may, despite claiming to be "objective", through their own bias determine the content of questions to ask and the randomness of samples (Bryant, 2000).

Random sampling and statistical testing may furthermore appear to make assessment of results transparent, but such techniques are not immune to manipulation by an unscrupulous researcher (Wainwright, 1997: 12). Servaes (1999: 108) affirms this argument by saying that no matter what type of research is conducted, the skills, ethics and honesty of the researcher will play an important role in determining whether the conclusions will be accepted by the reader or not. No human being is capable of making absolutely objective observations. The claims of objective legitimacy could be viewed as "subjectivity upon which a given aggregate of individuals have agreed to agree" (Arnst, 1996: 113). Objectivity, seen in this way, is therefore nothing more than inter-subjectivity (Servaes, 1999: 100).

Participatory research is contextual rather than "antiseptically objective" (Conti, 2000). It disputes the claim that social science research can be neutral and impartial. Social science research always supports or questions social forces, and as such has effects and side effects that may benefit or harm people (Reason and Rowan, as quoted in Maguire, 1987: 24).

3.3.2   Validity and reliability

In quantitative research reliability and validity are primary concerns (Servaes, 1999: 108). Participatory researchers, however, reject this framework of validity and reliability that is commonly accepted in quantitative research in the social sciences.

3.3.2.1   *The quantitative viewpoint*

Validity relates to the interpretation of data. It refers broadly to the degree to which an instrument is doing what it is intended to do (De Vos & Fouche, 1998: 84). Validity thus serves as a framework for assessing the quality of research conclusions.

Construct validity involves determining the degree to which an instrument successfully measures a theoretical construct (De Vos & Fouche, 1998: 85). In research it is important that a measurement technique be closely linked with known theory in the area and with other related concepts. Where such links can be demonstrated, the instrument is said to have high construct validity (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995: 136). Construct validity therefore refers to the degree to which conclusions can legitimately be drawn from the operationalisations in a study, to the theoretical constructs on which the operationalisations were based (Trochim, 1999). Questions and issues that might be raised concerning the above could constitute threats to construct validity.

Reliability has to do with the quality of measurement – referring to the accuracy or precision of an instrument (De Vos & Fouche, 1998: 85). In research terms this means repeatability or consistency – a measure is considered reliable if it would give the same result over and over again (Trochim, 1999). With quantitative methods, research becomes the operationalisation of concepts through the development of reliable measures that in turn serve to measure and substantiate the concepts (Servaes, 1999: 100).

3.3.2.2   *The qualitative viewpoint*

In quantitative research, internal validity examines the extent to which a particular research design has excluded all other possible hypotheses that could explain the variation of the "dependable variable" (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995: 82). Qualitative research does not seek internal validity, but rather external validity through involved subjectivity. Contrary to the assumption that research should be based on controlled observation, measurement and statistical criteria (De Souza, 1988: 34), the subjectivity of

experience is taken as a given and is not seen as inconsistent with validity, but rather as its source (Arnst, 1996: 117). The focus is on authenticity as opposed to validity (Tandon, 1988: 7).

Qualitative research furthermore does not strive for reliability in its tools of analysis (Arnst, 1996: 117). It assumes that research situations are multivariate and seeks conclusions that can be applied to local situations rather than broad generalisations (Conti, 2000). Reliability and validity in qualitative research is not regarded as bound to a particular method or tool, but pertain to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using those tools and methods in a particular context for that particular purpose (Maxwell, 1992: 284).

The aim of the qualitative researcher is to deepen his or her understanding of a social phenomenon by conducting in-depth and sensitive analysis of the "articulated consciousness of actors involved in that phenomenon" (Wainwright, 1997: 13). It is important to remember that the main objective of participatory research is to benefit the participants themselves. Indigenous knowledge and perspective as a point of departure in conducting participatory research, therefore essentially legitimises research results obtained (Tandon, 1988: 7).

In participatory research, when the people define the problem of research themselves, they will ensure its relevance. Their involvement in the whole research process assures the validity of the inquiry – the people's validity.

> What makes the qualitative study valuable is not its construct validity or reliability, but its external validity that arises from its foundation in human perception rather than rigorous methodology (Servaes, 1999: 117).

3.4   Conducting participatory research

Participatory research is a collective inquiry as opposed to the individual nature of traditional research methodology (Tandon, 1988: 12). It combines three activities or collective processes (Maguire, 1987: 20-30; Hall, 1984: 290):

- ▪   *Investigation* involving the people in posing and solving the problem. Together the people try to understand why and how the problem exists;

- ▪   An *educational component* assisting people to develop skills in collecting, analysing and utilising information;

- ▪   *Action* as a way for researchers and participants to deal with specific problems. The important point here is that all are involved in the decision-making regarding the use and applications of knowledge in their everyday lives.

3.4.1   Participatory research methodology

Participatory research strives to see the environment of those being studied from their perspective – a human approach to the understanding of the human world (Servaes, 1999: 117). Participatory research methodology is an approach "for productive life and work which differs from other more academic forms in that it can be assumed and practised by … people who need knowledge to defend their interests and ways of life" (Fals Borda, 1985: 97).

In traditional research methodologies a rigorous and continuous process of planning, observation, and evaluation brings about a course of action (Bryant, 2000). In contrast to this, there is no such strict methodology for

participatory research. Servaes (1999: 117) is of the opinion that as the emphasis in this type of research is on discovery rather than on routine procedures, it precludes rigid pre-formulated methods. Other authors of participatory research literature counsel against adopting a purist attitude towards participatory research (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 3) or embarking on a participatory research project with a strict blueprint or agenda as this "denies the process before it begins" (Arnst, 1996: 112).

De Souza (1988: 34) does, however, caution against renouncing all scientific and rational approaches to research. Method in some form or another is necessary as it translates the intellectual ideals of a field of study into a form of practice. In participatory research, methods, not prescribing but serving as guiding principles, can be important in presenting a discipline that will "encourage the development of reflective participative consciousness and a community of inquiry " (Reason, 1994(c): 201).

Since the early 1970's a number of different versions of the participatory research approach have been popularised (Anayanwu, 1988: 12) and references have been made to methods regarded as appropriate to participatory research and others that are not. Qualitative methods of data collection, for example, have been seen as more appropriate to participatory research whilst methods such as surveys and other quantitative methods were seen as irrelevant (Tandon, 1988: 13).

Hall, however, is of the opinion that one of the most dramatic shifts in research is the acceptance that research methods need not be limited to the conventional. On the other hand a "new" approach does not necessarily mean the invalidation of previously used methods, but opens up possibilities for using a wider variety of methods not previously considered (Hall, 1984: 296). Participatory researchers acknowledge that what a researcher observes and interprets is never independent from his or her academic

background, previous experience or involvement in the project (De Souza, 1988: 34). Therefore, the argument for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods under suitable circumstances is put forward by many authors in participatory literature. Some examples demonstrate the complementary nature of this combined approach to research (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b); Preston-Whyte & Dalrymple, 1996; Servaes, 1999): surveys and questionnaires would be appropriate where concrete information has to be collected from a large number of people; an exploratory study before embarking on a project might make use of conventional quantitative methods; by identifying the most important variables under which data could be explored, the collection of qualitative data can assist in formulating the specific content of questionnaires; and qualitative data may enliven and make more concrete the statistical pictures that come out of survey information.

3.4.2   The aims of participatory research

Participatory research as a methodology serves to promote the following:

3.4.2.1   The production of collective knowledge.

Conventional models of research place the researcher as producer of knowledge in a pivotal role (Cornwall, 1996: 94). Participatory methodology, however, actively and authentically involves participants throughout the process (Servaes, 1999: 117). It is a methodology that reflects on methods and techniques to discover, create and recreate methods for the production of knowledge by the people (De Souza, 1988: 33).

3.4.2.2   Collective analysis.

In conventional models the researcher gathers disparate items of information to be processed elsewhere (Cornwall, 1996: 94). In participatory research there is direct involvement of the participants in the selection of objectives, development of data collection methods and data analysis.

3.4.2.3   Critical analysis by groups and individuals.

In participatory research the aim is to describe and understand rather than to test hypotheses (Conti, 2000). The methodology helps participants to explore various explanations and solutions to their problems thereby building self-confidence and self-reliance (Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993: 212).

3.4.2.4   The building of relationships as part of the collective problem-solving process.

In traditional research the roles of researcher and subject are mutually exclusive. In participatory research this is replaced by an active relationship based on reciprocal initiative and control (Reason, 1994(a): 42).

3.4.2.5   Linking reflection and evaluation with action.

Participatory methods take time asking about the Who?, What?, Where?, Why?, and When? (Servaes, 1999: 117), and acting on the conclusions arrived at. It is a flexible rather than rigid methodology (Conti, 2000) with a general flow from study to reflection to action.

In the opinion of the majority of the authors of participatory research literature, traditional research methodologies are ill-suited to the requirements of social science research and generally restrict the focus of

social scientists to short-run and isolated events often resulting in an oversimplification of complex phenomena (Bryant, 2000). With regard to the methodology for participatory research, one can come to the conclusion that although there are distinctive features unique to this type of research, in the words of Whyte (1991: 19) "the complexity of the world around us demands the deployment of a variety of techniques … not a commitment to the hegemony of a single research modality".

3.4.3   Phases in participatory research

As Maguire (1987: 40) states, there are numerous models within the literature for conducting participatory research. It becomes clear that researchers do not recommend a set method for conducting research. When studying the implementation of various projects, it is also apparent that researchers developing models for participatory research approach this from the basic premise that the unique conditions of individual projects should determine the methods applied.

It is noticeable, however, that even though no prescriptive methodologies exist, most of the authors and researchers studied in the literature follow distinctive steps or stages in their investigation. Although some models do not display clear demarcations between phases, and stages sometimes overlap or are absent, the following summary of what is presented in the literature could be regarded as fairly representative of how a participatory research project can be carried out. The summary was compiled mainly from processes detailed by the following authors: Ayee, 1993; Conti, 2000; Freire, 1995; Maguire, 1987; Preston-Whyte & Dalrymple, 1996; Ramphele, 1990; Reason, 1994(a); Servaes, 1999; Van Rooyen & Gray, 1995; Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993; and Yoon, 1999.

3.4.3.1   First phase: Introduction to and entering the community

The aims of this phase are to identify the community that will be a partner in the research project and to organise the project. This may be done prior to entering an area as well as during the initial visits. Credibility is of utmost importance here. Researchers could draw on knowledge of the region and the people, or seek alliance with groups already in existence. It is important that an informal meeting with the people be held, explaining the reason for the investigation, and how it is to be carried out. Relationships should be established with possible participants, community organisers, leaders and institutions. The key guideline is that the research problem should originate in the community

3.4.3.2   Second phase: Identifying the problem

The aim at this stage is to identify and understand the most significant problems as perceived by the participants. This involves not only naming the problem but also questioning its underlying causes. Researchers need to take care not to force their ideas on the people or impose their own values on them. This is a period of listening and getting to know each other. This problem-posing dialogue continues over time and assures the collective identification and description of the problem ensuring full understanding of the problem by all involved.

3.4.3.3   Third phase: Planning action

By the end of this phase researchers and participants should have compiled the questions and themes to be investigated as well as deciding on issues such as data collection methods, and ways of analysing collected information. Communication plays an important role at this stage, as people need to be encouraged and provided with the opportunity to participate in the

planning process. Participants should ideally now design a process to investigate specific problems together, developing their own theories and solutions to problems. Findings of both researchers and participants should be regularly discussed and evaluated.

3.4.3.4   Fourth phase: Implementation of plans

This phase can be regarded as the touchstone/yardstick of the project. It is the stage in which the participants become fully immersed in their experience. After having reflected upon the conditions, problems, aspirations and resources of the community, researchers and participants need to decide on what action to take to address the problems they have defined and investigated. Training may be offered at this stage with the aim of empowering the people. In this way both the process and the products of research can be of direct and immediate benefit to those involved. Co-researchers may also at this stage reassemble to consider their original proposals and questions in the light of their experience, and modify or reframe them.

3.4.3.5   Fifth phase: Withdrawing from the community

As soon as the people indicate their readiness to take complete charge of the project, researchers should plan their withdrawal. The plans for this may be stated earlier on in the interactions with the community so that they can prepare for it. Withdrawal does not necessarily mean termination of interest. The withdrawal should also in most cases be gradual.

From the above one can see that participatory methods can be successfully used if researchers are committed to exploring solutions to the problems suggested by the people (Cornwall, 1996: 103). The quality of participation can be evaluated by asking whether participation occurs at all stages of the

research: initiation, design, data collection and analysis, interpretation of data, discussion, presentation and dissemination of findings (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 3).

Four main areas of participation can be identified (Ayee, 1993: 165): participation in decision-making, participation in implementation, participation in benefits and participation in evaluation. In each phase of the process, participants are increasingly involved in controlling decision-making in the project. And each phase strengthens the participants' awareness of their own resources and abilities for change, mobilisation and action (Maguire, 1987: 41). Success should therefore not be seen only in terms of achieving community participation in itself. The justification of participatory methodology lies in "participatory research acting successfully as a catalyst for ongoing creative and internal change" (Preston-Whyte & Dalrymple, 1996: 108).

3.4.4   Issues to be taken into account when conducting participatory research

The task of conducting participatory research is not an easy one (Maguire, 1987: 43). It not only requires a range of skills in human relationships from the researcher, but many other issues need to be taken into consideration when conducting a participatory research project:

3.4.4.1   Deciding on what constitutes participation.

Some researchers feel that true participation means putting the people in charge of making all the decisions and others feel that some decision-making should rest with the researcher (Yoon, 1999). Ideally research is initiated at the request of a community, realistically projects are more likely to be initiated by researchers (Maguire, 1987: 43). This may cause tension

between the planning of the project by the researcher and the planning of the project by the community itself (Botha, 1994: 70).

3.4.4.2   *Motivation versus apathy of the people*.

The community may have thoughts and feelings about problems requiring attention, but may find it difficult, or be unwilling to articulate them. People must be highly motivated in order to participate enthusiastically in projects. They must be quite certain that their efforts will bring some form of benefit (Hall, 1984: 295).

3.4.4.3   *Suitability of research materials and methods*.

Although use is made of both quantitative methods and qualitative methods, researchers must be sure that the methods suit the people participating in the project. Results should for example, be written up in short and easy-to-read format, or when working with illiterates, workshops could be organised where results can be presented and discussed.

3.4.4.4   *Flexibility*

Flexibility must be part of the programme (Yoon, 1999). Plans and objectives should be structured in such a way that changes can be accommodated as people begin to take an active part in shaping activities

3.4.4.5   *Manipulation*.

Participatory research can easily be utilised as a tool of manipulation by vested interest (Servaes, 1999: 116). The process of research should take precedence over the product or results of research (Botha, 1994: 70). People

should never be manipulated by the researcher even if it appears to be in the best interest of the community (Yoon, 1999).

3.4.4.6 Putting people at risk.

Participatory interventions are sometimes short-term interventions in people's lives (Richardson, 1997) and there is the professional imperative for researchers to publish the data gathered. Once the written documentation gets beyond the control of the researcher-community relationship, social repercussions can in some instances be unintentionally harmful to the community (Kronenburg, 1986: 256).

3.4.4.7 Keeping to the role of facilitator.

Even the best-intentioned researcher can inadvertently enhance dependency rather than empowerment (Servaes, 1999: 112). Researchers sometimes overcompensate for initial apathy by assuming a leadership instead of a sharing role. The community itself must claim ownership of the process (Botha, 1994: 70).

3.4.4.8 Expectations of the community

Researchers should be sensitive to the issue of raising expectations that they may be in no position to fulfil (Cornwall, 1996: 103). Appropriate application of specific results and actions are ethical considerations to be taken into consideration.

3.4.4.9 Time.

Dialogue and face-to-face interaction will mean that the researcher finds him/herself spending time in developing rapport and trust (Servaes, 1995:

46). Although Hall (1984: 296) argues that an effective process is worth the time taken, time is, according to Maguire (1987: 46), one of the most underrated limitations on participatory research – time required of the local people to participate in a project, and time commitment made by the researcher.

3.5   Applications of participatory research

It has been argued that participatory research is relevant only in developing countries, and the question of the relevance of these methods therefore presents a challenge (Tandon, 1988: 13). From the literature studied, however, it becomes clear that, although much of participatory theory and practice has its roots in experiences of developing countries, and many of the initial applications involved participation of developing communities in agricultural and health settings, participatory methods and ideas are by no means limited to developing areas.

3.5.1   General applications of participatory research

Authors on participatory research say that this system can be practised anywhere, regardless of socio-political or geographical context. Such methods have been used in a variety of disciplines in "western/developed countries" over the last two decades (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b); Gaventa, 1988; Hall, 1984; Servaes, 1996(a), 1999; Tandon, 1988).

Although these participatory research projects are too numerous to list, a glimpse at some of the various projects reported in the literature should present an idea of the diversity of areas of application:

- Gaventa (1988) reports on participatory projects in the United States: in rural areas where the interest of groups such as minorities, women, and the poor may not be well-represented within the knowledge elite; projects conducted by groups concerned with the education of the people; projects that evolved out of concern with participation by the people in decisions affecting their civil rights, environmental movements and community organising

- MacDonald (1986) discusses the role of participatory evaluation and planning in community development in the United Kingdom

- Hall (1984) speaks about the close links between people in different countries conducting participatory research – people active in women's movements, the peace and human rights movements and similar areas of interest

- A book edited by De Koning & Martin (1996(a)) presents experiences and reflections of both Third and First World academics and practitioners in health. It offers a variety of perspectives from countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the USA and Europe. Issues of equity as reflected in gender, race, class, and sexuality are major concerns of the contributors

- An article by Robinson (1999) discusses participatory research with people with severe medical conditions, emphasising the role people can play in research on their own conditions and situations, and with an approach which emphasises the importance of understanding their experiences in order that research be relevant

- Small (1988) reflects on participatory research from the point of view of a feminist political scientist in New Zealand

- Other authors discuss participatory research specifically from a feminist perspective (Braimoh, 1995; George, 1996; Maguire, 1987, 1996; Martin, 1994; and Weiler, 1991)

3.5.2   Participatory research applications in South Africa

A literature survey clearly shows that participatory research is not unknown in South Africa:

- Preston-Whyte & Dalrymple (1996) give an overview of a drama-based AIDS education programme run in black secondary schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal using a participatory research approach

- The compatability of the participatory research approach to social work in South Africa is researched by Van Rooyen & Gray (1995)

- Botha (1994) reports on a summer school in participatory research held at the University of Transkei in December 1994, under the auspices of the Research Capacity Building Directorate of the Human Sciences Research Council and the Social Science Research and Development Forum

- Ayee (1993) completed a D-Phil dissertation on rural community development following a participatory communication approach

- Van Vlaanderen & Nkwinti (1993) provide information on a community development project in the Ciskei based on participatory methods

- Ramphele (1991) uses a participatory research approach to document conditions of life in the migrant labour hostels of the Western Cape

- Participatory Development Thought in the field of health and agriculture in Venda is a topic of a study by Kellerman (1988)

3.6   Summary

From the preceding discussion of all the elements involved in participatory research, conducting the "ideal" project may seem an overwhelming expectation, and imposes a heavy agenda on the researcher as well as on the participants (Maguire, 1987: 47). It requires a willingness to learn from and with people, sensitivity, adaptability, patience, empathy and flexibility (Anyanwu, 1988: 15). Yoon (1999) goes so far as to suggest a training programme for participatory researchers, and identifies a long list of possible skills areas to be covered in the programme such as: language; listening; negotiation for conflict management; mediation for conflict resolution; methods for entering the community; facilitating participatory planning, action, evaluation, and iteration; withdrawing and keeping in touch with the community.

As will be seen in the following chapter, information is a commodity of value in society (Lundu & Nkhoma, 1992; Taylor, 1985) and information need is a concept that is inseparable from the values of society (Line, 1974: 87). More often than not, research methods and techniques for identifying information needs are developed and utilised without direct input from the people involved. Identifying information needs by means of the participatory research process on the other hand, would focus collectively on particular problems facing the participants and would attempt to use the research as a tool to bring about change, thus improving the quality of life of the people involved in the research (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995: 55).

The next chapter reviews the literature on information and information needs research, as an understanding of these concepts is essential before undertaking a research project to determine information needs from a participatory angle.

CHAPTER 4

Information needs research

4.1 Introduction

The main functions of communication - informing, socialising, motivating, debate and discussion, educating, entertaining, instructing, commanding, and influencing (Ascroft & Masilela, 1994; MacBride, 1980; Vickery & Vickery, 1992) - are linked to people's needs, both material and non-material. The satisfaction of these needs cannot be achieved without adequate communication and the provision of needed information. Communicated information alters the state of knowledge of the recipient (Vickery & Vickery, 1992: 17). This need for information and the relevance and acceptability of the information is directly linked to the individual and the context within which the information is to be used (Taylor, 1986: 152).

This study proposes to explore the use of a participatory research approach towards the identification of the information needs of a particular group of individuals. In order to provide a frame of reference for later discussion and the implementation of participatory techniques within the field of information needs research, this chapter will present a brief perspective on the nature of information and information needs. This will be followed by a discussion of the development of information needs studies and the move towards qualitative approaches in information needs research. The potential use of participatory research for information needs identification concludes the chapter.

4.2 Information

4.2.1   What is information?

Information is all around us (Rowley, 1998: 243). It colours our perceptions of our world and influences our attitudes, emotions and actions. A variety of attributes can be ascribed to information when attempting to define the concept, such as its value, reliability of content, reliability of source, novelty, clarity, subject domain, specificity or depth and instructional value, to name but a few. As information is fundamental to our existence and thus as such is part of a number of diverse disciplines, it should be defined according to the perspective from which the phenomenon is approached (Boon, 1992(a): 228). The term information is used in many different contexts and it is generally agreed upon in the literature that a universally accepted definition for the concept is difficult to formulate (Belkin, 1978; Boon, 1992(b); Prasad, 1992; Rhode, 1986; Van Lill, 1999) or even impossible (Meadow & Yuan, 1997).

Buckland (1991: 351) uses the term(s) in the following ways:
- Information-as-thing: to donate objects, such as data and documents that are referred to as information because they are regarded as being informative
- Information-as-process: when someone is informed, what they know has changed
- Information-as-knowledge: the key characteristic is that information as knowledge is intangible: one cannot touch it or measure it in any way

Meadow & Yuan (1997: 705-707), using the term information as point of reference, see the relationship between the concepts as follows:

- Information as messages that exist but are not necessarily sent or received, like a book in a library, unread, yet deemed to be significant for someone
- Information as a message sent to a destination or received by a destination, but not evaluated or understood. The message is in some way called to the user's attention, but not assimilated by the person
- Information as a message understood by the recipient and which changes that person's knowledge base

Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan (1982: 421), summarising the variety of definitions that have been offered, see information as something:
- that exists externally, outside frames of reference
- that can potentially provide a complete description of reality
- measurable on single, quantitative, uni-dimensional scales

Prasad (1992: 2-3), emphasising the assumption that our understanding of the meaning and nature of information depends on the context in which the word is used, describes information as:
- a commodity: assuming economic value
- energy: regarded as a quantifiable physical entity
- communication: regarded as synonymous with communication
- facts: this does not imply that there is any implied or actual use of the fact for some purpose
- data: the product of symbols organised according to established rules and conventions
- knowledge: representing an intellectual capability to extrapolate beyond facts and draw original conclusions

As can be seen form the above, other terms used in relation to and often interchangeable with information, are data and knowledge. Data usually means a set of symbols, facts and concepts with little or no meaning to a

recipient, whereas information could be seen as a set of symbols that does have meaning or significance to their recipient (Meadow & Yuan, 1997: 701). Knowledge, on the other hand, implies a state of understanding beyond mere awareness, and signifies an active involvement and understanding including value judgement (Prasad, 1992: 7).

4.2.2   The use of information

There is no field of human activity in which information is not a component. Many disciplines apart from information science are concerned with understanding how and why people use information (Wilson, 1997: 551). No matter what environment humans find themselves in, there will be circumstances that require answers to questions and solutions to problems (Manaka, 1986: 20). The uses to which people put information are as varied as human motives in general (Vickery & Vickery, 1992: 20), but for the purposes of this study the following areas of information use will be discussed:

4.2.2.1   *Information for decision making and problem solving*

To exist successfully, the individual needs information for decision-making and problem-solving - that is, to identify problems and opportunities, to evaluate them, to make choices and to plan for future action (Fairer-Wessels, 1989: 7). Decisions are based on knowledge, and a person's behaviour depends on a wide range of information and knowledge that may or may not have been used in a decision (Meadow & Yuan, 1997: 712). Taylor (1985: 47) sees information as a critical input to the decision-making process which provides the means by which people adapt to changing environments, allocate resources and maintain their well-being.

People need information to know in what ways they can influence what is happening in their own lives and their own immediate environment as well as on local, national or international levels. The impact of consequential decision, i.e. the making of choices that affect the welfare of a family, a group, an organisation, a community, a nation, cannot be underestimated (Taylor, 1986: 153).

4.2.2.2   Information for development

Development is mostly seen as synonymous with modernisation or transformation (Boon, 1992(a): 228). The rise of the knowledge industry in the 20th century has led to the dismissal of many traditional ways of sharing and understanding information and knowledge (Tandon, 1988: 10). This Western emphasis on intellect as the primary means of knowing has resulted not only in the casting aside of practices such as the oral transfer of information, but also in the devaluation of intuitive, practical, affective or spiritual knowledge (Reason, 1994(b): 12).

The *World Development Report* on *Knowledge for Development* (Petitat-Cote, 1998), in its analysis of the risks and opportunities that the global information revolution is creating for developing countries, confirms to a great extent the reality of the above statement for developing countries. The report concludes that access to financial, technical and medical knowledge is crucial to improving the quality of life of the poor.

In African countries, activities in which an information component is found have, to a large extent (and as confirmed in the *World Development Report*), been related to primary agriculture, health and similar basic survival areas. The world has, however, fundamentally changed and what is emerging is a dynamic, flexible, globally oriented economic activity, which has loosely been termed "the knowledge economy" (Wilson, 1998: 151). A huge number of

people and of occupations are engaged in the information industry. Diverse forms of organisation systems, networks and institutions have emerged within this society (Tandon, 1996: 19). Africa is far behind any region in the world when it comes to information technology, communications and electronic capabilities (Adesida, 1998: 240). Information technology has created a new class of "haves" and "have-nots" of information between and within countries. For African countries not to find themselves entrenched in the knowledge-poor category, but to be part of the knowledge-rich, they must be able to connect to the global information and knowledge systems. The establishment of indigenous cultural, intellectual, scientific and technological knowledge systems of South Africa and Africa are seen as crucial, not only for economic survival, but also for the development of a common consciousness and pride (South Africa Yearbook, 1999: 449). Only then will these countries be able to achieve their own vision of the future by using technology as tools for the betterment of humanity and an opportunity to satisfy their material and spiritual needs (Adesida, 1998: 252).

Knowledge is seen as the cumulation and integration of information received by a person/persons (Meadow & Yuan, 1997: 709). The impact of information on development thus means that actual behavioural changes in people and their circumstances, economic or political, should be the consequences of provision of information. If knowledge is to be effectively employed to help people, it needs to be interpreted and evaluated by those it is designed to help. This requires people to have access to information on the issues that affect their lives and the capacity to make their own contributions to policy-making processes (Malan, 1998(b)).

4.3   Information needs

4.3.1   The concept of need

Need is a subjective experience that occurs in the mind of the person in need (Wilson, 1981: 7) - it is a force, a necessity, a want for something useful and desirable (Fairer-Wessels, 1989: 16). Morgan & King (as quoted in Wilson, 1997: 553) propose that needs emerge from three kinds of motives, namely: physiological motives such as hunger and thirst; unlearned motives including curiosity and sensory stimulation; and social motives such as the desire for affiliation, approval or status, and aggression.

The description of needs can also be brought into relationship with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He proposes that a person develops through a hierarchy of needs from the basic survival necessities to the higher more spiritual needs. All these categories and/or levels are interrelated in that one type of need may trigger another, and as part of the search for satisfaction of these needs an individual may seek information.

4.3.2   The concept of information need

Ascroft & Masilela (1994: 286) postulate that living organisms survive not just by ingesting energy in the form of food, water and air, but also by ingesting information necessary for enabling them to adjust to their changing environments. Wilson (1981: 7) is in agreement with this statement when saying that the association of the word "information" with "need" implies a basic need similar to other basic human needs.

As with many other terms, an overview of the literature produces a variety of ways of describing or defining information needs and the investigation of

information needs could be described as "the subject of much debate and no little confusion" (Wilson, 1981: 3).

Rhode (1986: 52) gives a handy summary of ways in which the study of information needs have been or could be approached, and some of the complications associated with investigating the subject:

- The concept of need is complicated by the necessity to distinguish between expressed, unexpressed or unfelt needs
- Needs can be categorised as immediate or deferred
- One way of expressing the idea is to view need as shaped by activity, such as problem-solving or decision-making, or as latent, manifest through a passive reception of information which is stored as knowledge
- Different types of needs may be identified based on the stage of a project or activity
- Another way of handling the concept has been to identify the factors that affect information need, such as type of work
- Information needs may also be influenced by the systems available to satisfy them
- Other environmental factors such as social, political, economic and legal systems within which a person operates can be important
- Needs may also grow out of previous needs in the course of solving a problem, making a decision or completing a work task

4.3.3   Categorisation of information needs

Various categorisations of information needs have been formulated. The following are some examples illustrating the diversity of approaches to this subject:

Taylor (1968) explored information needs from the angle of the psychology of human behaviour, identifying the following types:

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- Visceral need - actual but unexpressed need for information
- Conscious need - ill-defined area of decision
- Formal need - area of doubt which may be expressed in concrete terms
- Compromised need - a need translated into what the resources can deliver

According to **Paisley's** studies (1968) of the information gathering and information disseminating behaviour of scientists and technologists in a working environment, information need is not a psychological state of mind, but an objective need oriented towards particular tasks, problems etc.

Wilson (1981; 1997) is of the opinion that the whole range of human personal needs - physiological, affective and cognitive - affect information-seeking behaviour. He states that the concept of need is not clear and can refer to:

- Need expressed by the user
- Need that a user cannot express
- Present or immediate need
- Future or deferred or potential need

Prasad (1992: 36) divides information needs into the following categories:

- Social or pragmatic information needs - information required to cope with day to day life
- Recreational information needs to satisfy the recreational and cultural interests of the individual
- Professional information needs - information required to operate competently within a business or professional environment
- Education information needs required to satisfy academic requirements at an educational institution

Nicholas (1996: 8) sees needs divided into two categories:

- Dormant needs - when people are unaware of what they need or unaware of new information available which could be of value
- Unexpressed needs - people are aware of needs but do nothing to express the need

Ingwersen (2000: 7) presents a matrix of four cases of information needs within the context of a perceived work task situation and the corresponding information-seeking behaviour. Needs are classified as:

- Stable & well-defined needs
- Stable & ill-defined needs
- Variable & well-defined needs
- Variable & ill-defined needs

Line (1974) attempted to define various concepts associated with information need in order to facilitate the differentiation between the terms.

- Need: what an individual **ought** to have for his work, research, his edification, recreation etc. There may be an implied value judgement in the way the term is used. A need may or may not be identified as a want. A need is a potential demand

- Want: what an individual **would like** to have. They may need information they do not want, or want information they do not need. A want exists in the mind of the user. It is subjective and represents the preferences and interests of the user. A want is, like a need, a potential demand

- Demand: what an individual **specifically asks** for, an articulated need - a request for information believed to be wanted or needed. A demand is a potential use

- Use: what an individual actually *uses.* A use may be a satisfied demand or may be the result of incidental "discovery" - information recognised as a need or a want when received, although not previously articulated as such

- Requirement is a bridging term and can mean what is needed, or what is wanted or what is demanded. It is used to cover all three categories

From the above, it is clear that some *basic underlying principles* are applicable when discussing the concept of information need:

- Information need can be regarded as a lack of self sufficiency - a certain incompleteness, an inadequacy in the "state-of'-readiness" to interact purposefully with the world around <you> (Ingwersen, 1982: 167)

- Needs are situational and change as the situation changes. Information need is always related to the individual who perceives it and the situation which creates it (Manaka, 1986: 20)

- Closely related to this is Derr's expression of two conditions for the need for information (Derr, 1983: 274) namely i) the presence of information purpose, and ii) that information is not needed unless it clearly contributes to the achievement of this information purpose. Neither of the two conditions is sufficient in itself

- Needs are affected by factors such as: the range of services available, the uses to which information will be put, the background, motivation and professional orientation of the information user, and the social, political and economic systems surrounding the user (Paisley, 1968: 2)

4.3.4 Approaches to information needs studies

Various approaches to the assessment of information needs have been used, such as the following:

4.3.4.1 System-oriented approach

Traditional approaches to information needs and user studies saw information as having an existence independent of thought or of resources or of receivers, and as something that describes reality which can be discovered, described and predicted (Rhode, 1986: 53). This premise has promoted a view of information use from the system's perspective rather than responding to user's problems. A typical study in this (systems-oriented) genre examines the extent to which an individual has used one or more information systems measuring the extent to which different kinds of sources, media, systems, documents, materials or channels are used. Such studies imply that needs are revealed by knowing how users use systems (Dervin & Nilan, 1986: 7). This view ignores the fact that human beings create their own reality (Rhode, 1986: 53), and that they have their own information stores which they use to make sense of external information and the situations in which they find themselves at any given time. As a result there was a call for alternative sets of premises and assumptions focusing on the users themselves in determining their information needs and uses.

4.3.4.2 User-centred approach

The focus of research thus shifted to the user and user behaviour - concentrating on users' cognitive processes rather than being system-centred (Hewins, 1990: 155). This approach moves the user from one who has a passive role in information seeking to one who has an active, productive, purposeful role (Rhode, 1986:53).

This move towards person-centred studies focusing on identifying user's characteristics rather than on measuring system performance was begun by researchers such as Paisley, 1968; Dervin, 1977; Belkin, 1978; Ford; 1980; Wilson, 1981; 1994; Taylor, 1985; Dervin & Nilan, 1986.

- The best example of the user-value approach/value-added approach was that of Taylor where the emphasis is on the user and on his or her perceptions of utility and value (Taylor, 1985: 47)

- Early authors such as Paisley (1968) refer to the desirability of theories from the social sciences viewing users within a sociological environment or within the framework of a system. This framework assumes that by studying the groups to which the user belongs, needs of individual members of the group can be determined

- Other researchers (Dervin, 1977; Belkin, 1978; Ford 1980; Wilson, 1994) increasingly called for focussing on cognitive behaviour and developing cognitive approaches to assessing information needs

- Some studies are regarded as precursors of the ASK and Sense-making approaches:
    - Wilson (1981), as mentioned before, proposed the idea that the study of information-seeking should stand alone as a valid research area with no need to validate systems design
    - The classic work of Taylor (1968) on question negotiation, proposing four levels of need that users bring to the information-seeking task, was actually research into the cognitive processes that are involved in information need. This work places the user's cognitive process in the forefront of considerations of information provision (Kuhlthau, 1991: 363)

- A study carried out in Baltimore in 1973, addressing various issues on information needs within a conceptual model developed by Dervin, stands as a benchmark for large scale investigations of this kind (Wilson, 1994: 22). Information needs study was approached from the direction of the ordinary life and work experiences of urban residents - they were not asked to identify their information need, but to identify problems they experienced and how they went about to resolve them (Wilson, 1994: 23)

- The Sense-making approach was developed by Dervin and colleagues (Dervin, 1977; Dervin & Nilan, 1986). Dervin approached the problem as a communications researcher rather than an information scientist (Wilson, 1994: 31). This approach centres on the user's problem in the process of sense-making, consists of a set of conceptual and theoretical premises and a set of related methodologies for assessing how people make sense of their worlds, and how they use information and other resources in the process. These studies have their earliest roots in "everyday citizen information need studies" (Dervin & Nilan, 1986: 22) that point out the central position of information needs within the information system of the average citizen (Fairer-Wessels, 1989: 60)

- The ASK (Anomalous State of Knowledge) approaches, formulated by Belkin and colleagues, do not assess information needs per se, but focus on describing the nature of the cognitive wrongness that the user brings to an information system (Dervin & Nilan, 1986: 23). A person experiences gaps and uncertainties in a problematic situation, being unable to specify what is needed to resolve the anomalies. This research aims at identifying cognitive strategies that users will employ to overcome these situations, and the kinds of information that will be useful in the process (Belkin, 1978; Van Lill, 1999: 90)

- Many information needs studies and user studies focus on attempts to model users. Kuhlthau (1991) carried out a series of studies relating to information seeking, and developed a model for the information search process. User modelling, studies models of cognitive processes in order to design interfaces for information retrieval systems that emulate these processes (Hewins, 1990: 155).

- The INISS project (Wilson & Streatfield, 1977; Wilson, Streatfield & Mullings, 1979; Streatfield & Wilson, 1982) at Sheffield University into information needs and information-seeking behaviour in the social sciences departments was conceived as an action research programme. This project took research in information needs and users into a new direction (Wilson, 1994: 25) where practitioners collaborated with the researchers in solving some of their problems

4.3.5   Information needs studies

Identifying information needs can be a complex process and some factors that add to the complexity are: i) the fact that the same information is viewed differently by different people; ii) information is put to different uses depending on individual situations; iii) the flow of information and channels of communication are complex; and iv) individual preferences and behavioural aspects can add a further dimension of complexity (Devadason & Pratap Lingam, 1997).

The problem of information needs and information users has been studied fairly extensively by researchers in sub-Saharan Africa. As was seen in the previous section, views of information and information needs are to a great extent reflected in the methodologies chosen in order to conduct studies. It is furthermore necessary to keep in mind, as Lundu & Nkhoma (1992: 230)

state, that it is of the utmost importance that information needs have to be assessed bearing in mind the prevailing cultural, social, economic and political realities of the country and the people where the study is done.

4.3.5.1   Information needs studies in Africa

Most of the African studies that have been conducted emanate from Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia. Some examples of these are the following:

- Aboyade's (1984) study focused on the question of providing library and information services to non-literates in rural settings in Nigeria and the difficulties in meeting their information needs as they are unable to make use of the written word. Participant observation was the methodology used as it had proved itself to be more reliable and valid than other methodologies in this type of situation (Aboyade, 1984: 246). One of the important problems encountered was the difficulty that most of the rural villagers had in identifying and articulating their information needs

- Kaniki (1991) conducted a study on the information seeking situations of Zambian farmers and their use of a variety of information providers. Data was collected through structured interviews. Interview schedules were translated into seven major Zambian languages as each farmer was interviewed in the language he/she was most comfortable in. Recommendations were made as to how libraries could improve their effectiveness in meeting or assisting farmers to meet their information needs

.
- Lundu and Nkhoma (1992), identified the major characteristics of small scale entrepreneurs in Zambia and their particular information needs

- Mchombu (1992) made use of the critical incidence technique and direct questioning of respondents in his study on the information needs for rural development in Malawi. Results indicated that rural development information needs could not be determined by simply questioning the rural people as there was a tendency to under-express needs especially if needs were requested as an abstract concept (Mchombu, 1992: 30). The approach taken was thus to look at needs in the context of production and the social problems of the rural population, by asking the people to narrate a problem which they or close family members had recently faced, and to indicate the persons consulted for advice in order to solve the problem

- Moahi and Monau (1993) looked at the library and information needs of disabled people in Botswana. Data collection was by means of a questionnaire and interviews of disabled people themselves, as well as an additional group of people caring for or providing a service for disabled persons

4.3.5.2   *Information needs studies in South Africa*

A variety of information needs studies in South Africa is found in the literature covering traditional library and information provision areas. These include users of different types of libraries, students and academic staff as users, information needs of users from a variety of disciplines such as health care, engineering, plant pathology, agriculture, and many more. Maepa (1999), in a general overview of information needs studies, is of the opinion that rural black people, who constitute a large proportion of the overall population, have been marginalised within the previous political context, also with regard to research projects. This sentiment is echoed by Legoabe & Boon (1992: 140) saying that studies on the information needs of black South Africans have been tackled mainly from a Western point of view.

In South Africa, with a foot in both the First and Third Worlds, information needs studies should ideally reflect the needs of people representing both these worlds. The following are some examples of information needs studies done in South Africa representing non-mainstream issues:

- Tsebe, in his analysis of the information needs of black South African society, comments specifically on the lack of research conducted on information needs of blacks and on the fact that the studies and writings touching on the subject, are more library than information oriented (Tsebe, 1985: 122)

- Manaka (1986) wrote on the information needs of blacks in general, stressing their varying educational levels, levels of sophistication and the effect of these lifestyles of individuals and communities on information needs

- A report by Van Zijl (1987) called for better insight and understanding into problems experienced by the black sector in South Africa. By means of a literature study covering a variety of disciplines, he focused on identifying non-physical needs that influence the types of information needed by this sector of our society

- Bekker and Lategan (1988) did a study in which empirical evidence was gathered mainly by means of structured interviews with information practitioners working in new black urban communities. The issue was explored by firstly describing the characteristics of a community and identifying the primary needs of the residents. Subsequently, information needs and ways in which the needs were being met, were identified

- Fairer-Wessels (1989) did a study concentrating on the information needs and behaviour of black women in their daily lives outside the occupational

context. After a literature survey identifying and grouping information needs based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they were tested by means of the non-probability method (a pre-test and structured interviews) and the probability methods (cluster sampling using semi-structured interviews) for validity in the specific population tested

- Legoabe and Boon (1992) systemised various studies done on information needs in urban black areas in South Africa. The results of their studies were laid before "wise people" in Mamelodi to see whether the results reflected the people's information needs and what they thought the information needs were

- Kaniki (1995) conducted a study in two rural communities in KwaZulu Natal and in Transkei. He assessed the information needs of these communities; asked what information providers they used; and investigated the demographic distribution of each community, and the implication of this for information provision in the area. The methodology focused on the critical incident approach in conjunction with a self-administered questionnaire and/or interview protocol for those circumstances

- In a study done by Oosthuizen (1997) on the information needs of teachers of Orange Farm, a black urban informal settlement, questionnaires consisting of open and structured questions were used as the data collection instrument

- Mogane (1998) made use mainly of questionnaires and interviews to report on the community information needs of the Ivory Park informal settlement community

- Maepa (2000) did a study on the information needs and information-seeking patterns of rural people in the Northern Province using structured interviews incorporating the critical incident technique

In his overview of information needs studies, Maepa (1999) commented that most of the studies conducted in Africa are largely descriptive of the information needs of citizens, without applying any of the theories and techniques that have been developed by other researchers over the years.

From the examples described above one can see, with the exception of a few studies such as those of Legoabe & Boon, of Kaniki, and of Maepa, that variations on quantitative methodologies such as questionnaires and surveys dominate. It is also clear that none of the studies touches on the information needs of rural or urban Coloureds and only that of Fairer-Wessels concentrates exclusively on the needs of women.

4.4   Qualitative approaches to information needs studies

4.4.1   Development of qualitative methodologies

As was discussed in Chapter Two, logical positivism or positivistic science has been challenged in the social sciences over the past decades, and the way in which the social scientist views and studies man in his environment has been questioned.

A similar dissatisfaction with the results of traditional studies of information needs and information-seeking behaviour led researchers to begin questioning the assumptions underlying past research (Rhode, 1986: 59). Quantitative research methods that were adopted for measuring or counting things such as the number of visits to a library or the use of certain resources

came to be regarded as inappropriate to the study of human behaviour (Wilson, 1981: 250). The confusion of quantity with quality in evaluation, and the idiosyncratic definitions of information user, information use, information need and user studies are all seen as part of the positivist legacy (Rhode, 1986: 61). In the literature, positivist/objectivist views of the world as being discoverable, describable and predictable, have been challenged by various researchers such as Dervin (1977), Dervin & Nilan (1986), Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan (1982), Wilson (1981 & 1984), Streatfield (1983), Hall (1981), and Swift, Winn & Bramer (1979), to name but a few.

In the natural and physical sciences it may be possible to ignore the social nature of knowledge generation, as researchers can achieve a degree of detachment from the phenomena they study (Swift, Winn & Bramer, 1979: 216). However, dissatisfaction with a quest for generalisation and depersonalisation of information provision and use stimulated the emergence of new qualitative methods of information needs research:

- One of the major breakthroughs was the development of a methodology concerned with the needs of individuals in a variety of situations using situational theory. The basis of this theory is the assumption that the factor common to all situations is that people move through time and space making their own sense of the world in order to move through it (Rhode, 1986: 62). The primary researchers in this area are Dervin and her colleagues (Dervin, 1977; Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan, 1982; Dervin & Nilan, 1986). For example, innovative studies based on the time-line concept were done, in which each respondent was able to define his/her information seeking and use relative to his/her own perspective and in qualitative terms of time and space (Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan, 1982: 428)

- The critical-incident method was another "first" in innovative methods for data collection and is regarded as a very effective way of assessing

information needs (Hewins, 1990: 148). It is tied to the decision-making process in a specific situation and defines the criteria used in source selection and system performance (Hewins, 1990: 163)

- The view of the individual as sense-maker (see Dervin et al. above) also underlies the work of Swift and colleagues in their outline of a system for social science and educational literature based on providing a series of multiple representations of any collection of material (Swift, Winn & Bramer, 1979: 220)

- Another qualitative approach is seen in the area of studying information needs as they arise in work settings or as the result of work tasks (Streatfield, 1983; Wilson, 1981)

- Hall (1981: 103), in studying patterns in the use of information, regards the priorities in value which users apply in the evaluation of information as a dynamic function of intended use. Hall disagrees completely with the idea that value consists only of things that can be measured

- The INISS project mentioned before, envisaged adopting an action research approach to the problems of information provision in social services departments at the University of Sheffield (Streatfield & Wilson, 1982: 273). The underlying principle of the study was that users themselves present problems to be solved and are involved in the discovery of potential solutions to these problems (Streatfield & Wilson, 1982: 274)

4.4.2   The use of qualitative research approaches

Qualitative research seems particularly appropriate to the study of information needs as the concern is*, inter alia,* with the uncovering of facts of

the everyday life of the people concerned. By better understanding the needs, one is able to better understand what meaning information has in the life of the people (Wilson, 1981: 11).

Although there was a growing polarisation between quantitative and "non-quantitative" researchers (Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan, 1982: 423), the presentation of new methodologies for information needs studies did not always necessarily mean using qualitative methodologies as complete alternatives. Many researchers, in turning to qualitative research, used both quantitative and qualitative methods in a complementary fashion. Streatfield (1983: 229) for instance, does not advocate summarily abandoning all positivist notions. Dervin, Jacobson & Nilan (1982: 427) presented a methodology of which the purpose was simultaneously quantitative inquiry and qualitative sensitivity to the individual, using the two modes in a complementary fashion.

4.5　The use of participatory research methods to establish information needs

Information work in developing countries differs markedly from that in developed countries. Karelse (1994: 22) proposes that information provision and services in these situations should move away from the conception of information and information servicing as something neutral, towards an understanding of information work as a dynamic, interactive process involving the people themselves.

The paradigm shift towards the centrality of the user in information needs studies can be seen in the light of using alternative methodologies arising from a different set of assumptions about the nature of information and information use. Wilson (1994: 25) sees this move to qualitative methods,

resulting in a more holistic and non-analytical approach to information needs research, as a natural one, as the user-centred approach requires more in-depth information on people's behaviour than most of the other methods used.

In the social sciences research paradigms often build on one another and this opens possibilities for theorists and researchers to deepen and widen their views in an evolutionary way (Servaes, 1999: 30). The use of participatory research as an alternative method of knowledge production with the group of Coloured women chosen as the target group for this research project, presents a unique opportunity to realise the aims of user-centred information needs studies. It is a tool through which the experiences and the opinions of the women, as a group and as individuals, are acknowledged and valued in the process of identifying their information needs.

CHAPTER 5

The choice of the target group for the research project

5.1 Introduction

This study aims *inter alia* to test the suitability of the method of participatory research within the South African context with a group of women from the Eersterust Coloured community.

Participatory research, as was seen in a previous chapter, can be practised within wide and diverse situations and subject areas. Different research problems and different situations call for different strategies (Whyte, 1991: 8). Participatory research maintains that knowledge of the specific context of the research community is critical for the success of the project (Maguire, 1987: 113).

This chapter attempts therefore to provide the necessary understanding of the background and setting within which, and people with whom, the participatory research methodology is to be used. A general overview is given of the Coloureds in South Africa concerning their historical background and current socio-economic, political and religious status. In order to provide a frame of reference for the practical implementation of the research project, information on the Eersterust community is given, and a brief personal perspective on the women involved in the study is presented. The role of women in South African society in general is discussed, and a review of the specific relationship of feminist research with participatory research aims to provide background information to serve as an indication of the significance

of the practical use of participatory research methods in this study with the group of women chosen to participate in the project.

5.2 Background of the target group

5.2.1 The Coloureds in South Africa

According to the latest South African census figures released in October 1996, there were 40,58 million people in South Africa. Of these 8,9 percent classified themselves as Coloured (South Africa Yearbook, 1999: 1).

5.2.1.1 Origin and background

The Coloured population of South Africa has its origin in the contact between various ethnic and racial groups at the southern tip of the African continent over a period of more than 300 years. Cilliers (1963: 9) identifies four original elements which were involved in the formation of this population group, namely a Khoi element, a slave element, a White element and a small Bushman element. Van der Ross (1979: 38) makes a finer distinction by including two other groups that contributed to the existence of the Coloureds, namely the Malays (as slaves or political exiles) and the Blacks (i.e. Bantu-speaking people of Southern Africa).

The Khoi (Hottentots) and San (Bushman) peoples were the country's earliest inhabitants (South Africa Yearbook, 1999: 21). The Khoi were a nomadic people who owned herds of cattle and sheep and Bushmen were a primitive nomadic people about whose origin there is no definite clarity. According to old records, Van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape with very few women and, although there were initial difficulties with assimilation, many mixed marriages are recorded (Venter, 1974: 14).

Slaves, imported for personal labour in general practice of the times mostly from the Dutch East India and West Africa, became an important element in the formation of the present coloured population (Cilliers, 1963: 10). Some attempts were made to prevent unions between slaves and Europeans, but their assimilation and westernisation proceeded rapidly.

In the ensuing encounters with indigenous Black people later in the 18th and 19th centuries, more intermixing took place, resulting in a complicated situation with the number of combinations of intermixture infinite and the geographical distribution extremely wide (Van der Ross, 1979: 41).

The Coloured people in South Africa do not therefore necessarily constitute a unity, as their grouping as "Coloureds" even today, implies. Coetzee (1975: 1) opines that the use of the expression "Coloured" to designate this component of the South African population, suggesting one ethnic, cultural or racial group, is wrong. The only common factor that can be found in the overall separation of the Coloureds as a population group, as they have been identified for the most part of South African political history, is the fact that their skins are a little darker (or lighter) than the rest of the population (Venter, 1974: 2).

5.2.1.2 The question of Coloured identity

5.2.1.2.1 What is identity?

According to Josselson (1987:10) identity can be described as the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. The *Collins Paperback English Dictionary* (1992: 412) defines the term as "the state of being a specified person or thing; the individual

characteristics by which a person or thing is recognised". Your very personality consists in your being a particular person, different from others.

Personal identity is possessed by everyone and has nothing to do with race, colour or religion, whereas group identity is something else. With group identity we are concerned with varying elements such as physical characteristics, common history, common heritage or culture (Van der Ross, 1979: 35).

At the same time, our identity is fundamentally interwoven with others' to gain meaning. Identity in this instance can be regarded as a "process of repositioning ourselves and reconfiguring positions of relationships" (Burman, as quoted in Prinsloo, 1997: 22). Identity thus becomes a way of judging ourselves with respect to a typology or set of values that is meaningful to others with whom we identify ourselves (Josselson, 1987: 11).

5.2.1.2.2 Identity in South Africa

Globally speaking, the West has been "clearly in the saddle as the sole model of the human, the civilised and the good" (Saks, 1997: 71), with the rest of the world merely supplements to the West playing no essential part in the construction of this identity. It could furthermore be said that masculinity is associated with global capitalism and the domination of the West in economic and political life and that this hegemonic form of masculinity is accompanied by "a hegemonic form of racism and both are recognisably Western" (Moore, 1994: 63).

According to Saks (1997: 72) South African apartheid could perhaps be regarded as the ultimate expression of the above claim since it asserted that the nation was white, European and ultimately, male. Not conforming to the

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constructs of whiteness, Europeanness and maleness of the nation, persons of colour essentially became non-persons in this country.

Multiculturalism became the major ideological response of the West to the failure of previous approaches that assumed that racism is caused by the "strangeness" of immigrants, and that with eventual assimilation, the issue would disappear (Yuval-Davis, 1994:185). With the glaring failure of apartheid fresh in mind, at present the South African approach is one of a multi-lingual, multi-faith and multi-cultural society in one South Africa - a "rainbow nation" (Saks, 1997: 74). This political discourse of multiculturalism necessitates the reframing and repositioning of identities (Prinsloo, 1997: 22). It could also lead to profound marginalism of those whose styles of life and complex identities do not conform to the "mythically imposed we" (Saks, 1997: 74) or to the ideology of the "founding myth" of a non-racial nation-to-be (Alexander, 1996: 104).

In essence one is concerned here with questions of difference, sameness and sharing. If rights in South Africa - political, economic, social – are to be determined by culture (in this case multiculturalism), then those without roots and history such as many Coloureds may feel to be, need to "reposition themselves and reclaim their stake, or be doomed to perpetual marginalisation" (Hendricks as quoted by Prinsloo, 1997: 22).

5.2.1.2.3 Coloured identity in South Africa

The concept of "coloured identity" has always been controversial (Simone, 1994: 161). Historically the statute books defined the Coloureds negatively – a part of the population not belonging to any recognised group - being neither White nor Black – essentially a non-entity. The "grand design of apartheid" (Prinsloo, 1997: 21) had created a buffer grouping which had no distinctive cultural or other descriptive boundaries. Notwithstanding this not-being, they

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were and still are regarded as a separate, viable population group within the South African context.

Van der Ross (1979: 15) questions the assumption that Coloured people have their own, unique identity that is essentially different from that of other South Africans following the Western European life-style. When referring to the "myth" of Coloured identity (Van der Ross, 1979: 2), he does not negate the use of the word coloured as compared to white or black within the context of population groupings. He rails specifically against the misconception that Coloureds have the same origins, that they are easily recognisable, that they have their own culture, and that they are all the same and belong together.

The dilemma of coloured identities, according to Simone (1994: 162) stems from the way notions of identity are thought of and fought over in South Africa. Van der Ross is of the opinion that the whole identity issue originated from the Afrikaner issue. The Afrikaner resisted many attempts of anglicisation by the English and derived great benefit from the idea of identity, and thus became convinced that all other groups necessarily had to have their own identity. He acknowledges that this argument might be valid in some cases, but not in the case of a group as mixed and as Westernised as the Coloureds (Van der Ross, 1979: 17).

As mentioned before, the current political discourse of multiculturalism in South Africa necessitates the rethinking and solidifying of identities. Simone (1994: 161) feels that the way in which Coloured identity is viewed in future will stem from the ways in which a workable sense of multi-ethnicity and citizenship is formed. With the negative realities of the apartheid era behind us, Prinsloo (1997: 21) is, in contrast to the above views of Van der Ross, of the opinion that the persistence of a specific Coloured social identity cannot be summarily argued away. Using the 1994 elections as an example, when people were upset and surprised when the formerly oppressed Coloureds

voted for the party of the former oppressor, she identifies the unease which characterised the reactions to the emergence of an assertive, common Coloured identity (Prinsloo, 1987:22).

5.2.1.3   *The social and cultural life of the Coloureds*

Culture can be seen as composed of values, beliefs, norms, rationalisations, symbols and ideologies i.e. mental products. Culture can also be seen as referring to the total way of life of a people, their interpersonal relationships and attitudes. Servaes (1999:10) sees culture as the equivalent of personality and therefore not amenable to simplistic classification or pigeonholing. He sees culture as social settings in which a certain frame of reference has taken concrete form or has been institutionalised. Culture means one's life-style, as determined by language, religion, systems of value, moral or ethical codes, dress, legal system, housing, occupation, and so forth (Van der Ross, 1979: 8).

All over the world mixed race people "confront social and political circumstances unparalleled anywhere else" (Simone, 1994: 164). In South Africa, as a result of their close integration into the economic, religious and political structure of the dominant white pattern of life, Coloureds gradually assumed the social and cultural characteristics of the dominant white western culture (Cilliers, 1963: 13; Simone, 1994: 166). Remains of Khoi and Black heritage is extremely rarely found (Coetzee, 1975: 2). Coloured groups that originated before the 19th century patterned their social and cultural set-up on the model of the White society of Dutch background. Later, under British rule, the original Dutch pattern became more English. Coloureds in Natal followed the cultural traits of the British, in Afrikaans environments they tended to follow Afrikaans customs.

Basically people prefer to associate with family and those they know. However, as they develop on economical, educational, intellectual and cultural level, those they know now include those with whom they can communicate on an equal footing (Van der Ross, 1979: 13). In spite of artificial attempts by the government to separate population groups, and at the same time, to mix different social classes by means of the Group Areas Act, coloured people sought out and supported opportunities to liaise with like-minded people of all population groups (Van der Ross, 1986: 364).

5.2.1.4   Religious affiliations of the Coloureds

In the early times at the Cape it was customary in towns and on farms for slaves and other servants to attend family prayers as members of the family, a custom that persisted into the 19th century. In the church places were reserved where "those of colour" could worship together with whites (Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa, 1973: 151). However, whilst accepting the custom of mixed worship, the church also committed itself to a policy of mission work and the principle of possible future separate congregations, resulting in the establishment of the first Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk for Coloureds in 1881.

In the course of South African history the idea and policy of separate development evolved. In 1929 the term "apartheid" was used in the Dutch Reformed Church ranks for the first time (Verhaal van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk…, 1997: 5). The first official attempt to ground apartheid on scripture was in 1943 and after 1948 the church insisted on the enforcement of the apartheid policy in many instances and many laws were brought about with the approval of the church (Verhaal van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk …, 1997: 9).

Over the years the Dutch Reformed Church has reflected on the basic and scriptural ground for the apartheid policy and the conviction steadily grew that such a directive could not be derived from the Bible (Cronje, 1987: 26). In the meanwhile, however, the Sendingkerk clearly made themselves heard on these hurtful issues with the culmination of their position being reached in 1982, accusing the Dutch Reformed Church of heresy. The resulting confession of Belhar was eventually accepted as the article of faith for the Sendingkerk.

5.2.1.5   Economic issues

The impact of legislation such as the Group Areas Act that removed people from their existing neighbourhoods, was not only the destruction of families and communities with disastrous results, but also the lowering of standards of living. Poverty with all its parallel phenomena such as unskilled labour, irregular employment, low wages, ill-health, crime, alcoholism, family instability, and malnourishment had far-reaching consequences.

Social and economic inequality generates awareness of limited and unequal civil rights. The striving to attain these rights will then become interwoven with political rights and sharing of power (Coetzee, 1975: 4).

5.2.1.6   Politics and the Coloureds

In the early years after Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape, the concept of racial intermixing had been accepted. However, a growing body of public opinion was beginning to appear that was against any further contact with people who were not racially "pure" (Venter, 1974: 22). The distinction between white and non-white was originally not associated with colour, but sprang from distinction between Christian and heathen (Cilliers, 1963: 11). With time, this distinction became identified with perceptible features of race

and colour and certain sectors of the (non-white) community were relegated to "their place" in the social scheme (Venter, 1974: 241).

Throughout the history of South Africa various measures had been in force that had the effect of separating different race groups in South Africa. When the National Party Government came to power in 1948 it began to dismantle political structures set up by former regimes to cater for the African, Asian and Coloured people (Davenport, 1991: 329). Its most important political task was to entrench its position by eliminating as many non-Nationalist voters as possible with the result that the Coloured people had to be "pushed off" the common parliamentary voter's roll (Van der Ross, 1984: 185).

In the more than forty years of National Party rule in the country a formidable array of laws were passed affecting social, political and economic separation on grounds of colour (Bennet et al., 1988: 134). Non-white people were excluded from any share in governance. Although the government took steps after 1960 to promote the economic and educational development of the Coloured people, it did not give them a defined territorial base for even local self-government (Davenport, 1991: 362).

The appointment by the prime minister in 1973 of the Theron Commission, of which a minority of its members were Coloured, to look at the problems caused by Government policy towards Coloured people was an indication of gradual changes on the political front. The recommendations of the commission were noteworthy for their departure from the segregationist line that had been typical up to this point (Davenport, 1991: 381).

The result of a constitutional debate in 1982 was a Tricameral Constitution that made provision for White, Coloured and Indian representation in the respective Houses of Parliament: the House of Assembly, House of Delegates and House of Representatives.

The April 1994 elections marked the beginning of a period of dramatic change in South Africa - a long awaited shift from the authoritarianism of the apartheid regime to a new inclusive democracy of a government of national unity (Caliguire, 1996: 9).

5.2.2   The Eersterust Coloured community

5.2.2.1   Origins of Eersterust

Pretoria, the administrative capital of the Republic of South Africa, was founded in 1855, acquired municipal status in 1903 and became a city on 14 October 1931 (City Council of Pretoria, 1993). Coloured persons from all over the country migrated there to seek work and settled primarily in an area now known as the Asiatic Bazaar and previously referred to as the Cape Reserve, as well as in areas such as Lady Selbourne, Eastwood, Claremont and Booysens.

In 1905 the owner of a farm situated to the North-East of Pretoria subdivided a part of his farm into erven intended for settlement for Coloureds. However, the erven were purchased mostly by Blacks, and only a small part of this area became known as the shanty town of Eersterust (City Council of Pretoria, 1994: 8).

Where exactly Eersterust derived its name is not known (Jacobs, 1969: 26), although some interesting theories are held. Some people believe that where Eersterust was established was the "first resting place" for mail coaches between Lydenburg and Pretoria towards the end of the 19th century. Others are of the opinion that the Republican forces after the invasion of Pretoria withdrew to a resting-place called Eersterust before continuing the battle. A common theory is that the owner of the original farm was an idealist who

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envisaged a "first resting place" in the Transvaal for "the descendants of slaves" in the development of the township.

The largest percentage of people in Eersterust originated from Cape Coloureds, with a small percentage of Griquas and a few Malays also represented. The current population of Eersterust stands at 22 899 (Statistics South Africa…).

5.2.2.2 Local government in Eersterust

In 1958 Eersterust was proclaimed as a Group Area for Coloured people. Properties in the area were expropriated and non-coloureds residing in the area were resettled in other areas. Initially the Department of Non-white Affairs, a department of the City Council of Pretoria, managed the municipal affairs of Eersterust (City Council of Pretoria, 1993). In 1963, 13 Coloured persons residing in Eersterust were appointed by the City Council to execute municipal duties at the municipal offices in Eersterust, reporting to the Pretoria City Council management committee. In 1966 the Group Areas Act was strictly enforced. All Coloured residing in the Cape Reserve and other parts of Pretoria were resettled in Eersterust (City Council of Pretoria, 1994: 8).

In 1972 the City Council of Pretoria appointed a directorate to manage the municipal affairs of Eersterust. In 1976 the first Management Committee of Eersterust was elected with some decision-making powers delegated to this committee (City Council of Pretoria, 1993).

In 1982 a bid put forward by the Management Committee to be allowed to attend Pretoria City Council meetings and ultimately to have direct representation in the city council, was doomed to failure (Coloureds face…, 1982: 2).

In 1991 the directorate established in 1972 was dissolved, the Group Areas Act abolished, and racial zoning to property holding therefore no longer applied. Fifty Coloured officials were employed to execute practical and administrative duties at the municipal offices housed in the new Eersterust Community Centre (City Council of Pretoria, 1993; 1994: 9). On 8 December 1994 the areas of Atteridgeville, Eersterust, Mamelodi and Pretoria were integrated in to one municipal body, the Greater Pretoria Metropole. In 2000 this local governing body changed its name to the Tshwane Metropolitan Council.

5.2.2.3   Housing in Eersterust

Various housing schemes comprising two and three-roomed units were developed by the City Council over the years in an effort to accommodate the growing Coloured community (City Council of Pretoria, 1993). In 1982 the first flats were erected, providing a little relief to a rapidly evolving housing problem in Eersterust (First Eersterus flat…, 1982).

Additional extensions to the originally proclaimed Eersterust area had been continuously developed, but in the mid-1980's the critical housing shortage compelled the Council to investigate possibilities of further extensions adjacent to the Eersterust area. These plans caused a great deal of discomfort and evoked sharp criticism from the white residents of areas in the vicinity (Hough, 1988(a); 1988(b)). However, a Coloured area called Nellmapius, partly situated on the farms The Willows and Swartkoppies, was proclaimed in May 1989 (City Council of Pretoria, 1994: 8).

Although Coloureds still form the greater majority of Eersterust residents, many Black, Asian, and a small number of White families live in the area (Statistics South Africa…).

5.2.2.4   Religion in Eersterust

The people in Eersterust are not exempted from the scope of the massive unemployment problem in South Africa (City Council of Pretoria, 1993). According to 1996 census figures only 8 396 of the economically active population in Eersterust were employed (Statistics South Africa…).

They have furthermore lived under disorganised social circumstances, and have been exposed to personal hardship and discrimination over many years.

Bearing in mind their heterogeneous origins and the above-mentioned factors, it is no wonder that the people have strong religious convictions and that the church plays a major role in the upliftment of the community.

The first church, the Roman Catholic Church, was erected in the 1940's. There are now 36 Christian denominations represented in the community as well as a few Islamic groups. The largest denominations in terms of numbers are the Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed and Anglican Churches (City Council of Pretoria, 1993; Statistics South Africa…).

5.2.2.5   Other points of interest

The Pretoria Child and Family Welfare Society has an office in Eersterust and renders services such as child care, legal aid, pre-school training, creche facilities, adoption and foster care. Various religious groups and the Eersterust Concerned Citizens Organisation render financial assistance and welfare services as well as care for the aged (City Council of Pretoria, 1993).

Leaders in the community place much emphasis on education, training and the acquisition of skills. Sport and recreational facilities are well represented. Youth development and outreach programmes, various pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools are available (City Council of Pretoria, 1993).

5.2.3   The women of the prayer group

The women with whom this research project was conducted belong to prayer group in the Coloured suburb of Eersterust. The group consists of dedicated Christians from many denominations and has now been in existence for a little more than seven years. New members have joined and some women have left, but a core group of eight has remained throughout the years including the two women who had the original vision of starting it.

5.2.3.1   Inception of the prayer group

The prayer group originated as a result of a vision. One of the women, by the name of June Marian, attended a funeral one Easter weekend about eight years ago. It was there that it came to her that the community of Eersterust was in dire need of prayer and the forming of a prayer group consisting of women of the community was a call that she could not ignore. At approximately the same time another lady of the community, Lizzie Booysen, was nurturing an identical dream. By chance they met and after talking and praying together, they decided to seek out similar-minded women with the intention of meeting on a regular basis. Thus the prayer group, with the sole aim of praying for the Eersterus community, was born.

5.2.3.2   Background of the women in the group

The prayer group is an inter-denominational group consisting of about ten women from all walks of life, who meet for prayers regularly every Tuesday in

alternating homes. The ages of the women vary, the youngest being in her mid-thirties, the oldest in her late sixties.

Approximately a quarter of the women in the group completed their high-school education. About half left school in standard eight (grade 10), and the others left school after completing standard six (grade 8). The elderly woman does not have any high school qualifications.

Three of the women who completed grade 10 went into training for nursing, but soon got married without completing their training. One of those who matriculated has a professional qualification in nursing. Both June Marian and Lizzie Booysen were trained as lay preachers in their church.

The majority of the women are unemployed, some by choice and others due to a lack of job opportunities and/or skills. One has full-time employment as a nurse, two are employed on a part-time basis whilst another got a full-time job as a receptionist as a doctor's office during the course of the research project.

Not one of the women comes from a rich or even very well off home environment. The women who have husbands with steady jobs live in nice houses and are able to cope economically. Many of the group, however, have husbands who do not have permanent jobs or are unemployed and they struggle financially, relying on children to help with income. The elderly woman is totally dependent on her children and is often assisted by the workers from the Welfare Department who provide food and other basic necessities.

5.2.3.3   Further observations

- The cohesiveness of the group and mutual trust between the women is very noticeable. They all regard the prayer group as the one place where they are unconditionally accepted and are able to say and do anything without fear of being judged

- The women play a leading role in the community, being called on individually, or in groups of two or three, to pray for people under trying or special circumstances

- The women are also extremely supportive of one another on a practical level, seeing to it that those who are in need of food or clothing or even money are helped in some way or another

- This approach is carried over in their everyday lives as many in the group, in spite of not having much for themselves, continuously have extra people from the community or other relatives living with them. Fostering children is another area of concern to them as many children in the community are abandoned by their parent(s)

These women encounter many difficulties within the reality of their own individual lives: poverty and unemployment, men who drink, who do not want to belong to any church, the problem of teenage daughters becoming pregnant and having to leave school, fighting and crime in their neighbourhoods, and many more. In spite of it all, the women in the group are always keen to be of help in the community, are dedicated in their faith and have a firm conviction of the miracles and healing resulting from their prayers.

5.3   Research with women

5.3.1   Women and the need for information

Women need information for decision-making and empowerment. It is therefore imperative that information should be available to women in order for them to participate in determining their own social, political, intellectual and personal goals (Mbambo, 1995: 48).

In many societies in the Third World women are the backbone of the economy and social development. In Africa, pre-colonial (Black) communal ownership of land that guaranteed access to all, including women, was displaced with European invasion and colonialism (Aniagolu, 1998: 9). Sexual division of labour furthermore denied women access to means of production and this overall marginalisation resulted in their inability to obtain the necessary information to be knowledgeable and enlightened in issues pertaining to their lives (Ngimwa, Ocholla & Ojiambo, 1997: 46).

Advances are, however, being made all over the world in the creation of coalitions among women, such as a growing number of networks linking various role players that are starting to break down barriers to communication and information (Riano, 1994: 31). And, at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, women used the United Nations system to define and claim their rights, including the right to be educated, to gain knowledge and to impart information (Fraser, 1995: 285).

In South Africa the scarcity of appropriate and useable information for women and on women's issues is still not prioritised. The country does, however, have strong inter-resource forums and networks in general. These could serve as basis for interactive information provision as a means of

empowerment as well as for policy development (Karelse & Radloff, 1995: 51).

5.3.2   Women and identity

As seen from a woman's perspective, the story of human development in the West is a story of a masculine path, where masculine attributes have been culturally defined as desirable and female attributes less desirable (Reason, 1994(b): 23) and where the male was adulated as the sole and essential bearer of identity (Saks, referring to works of Freud, 1997: 71). The most important task facing women is, according to Josselson (1987: 3), the formation of identity - incorporating her choices for herself, her priorities, and the guiding principles by which she makes decisions.

In previous theory and research (based mainly on Erikson's model of identity formation) women have often been found inferior to men in their identity achievement as defined by male characteristics (Tarver-Behring, 1994: 207). Women-oriented researchers, however, emphasise differences between women and men's styles of thinking and valuing (Reason, 1994(b): 24). They point out the importance of relationships and of affiliation as central to women's identity; the construction of identity through intimacy, nurturance and other relatedness; and the importance of dialogue, reciprocity and co-operation in women's ways of knowing (Reason, 1994(b): 24; Tarver-Behring, 1994: 206).

Identity formation is a process unique to each individual. The meaning of being a woman differs, depending on the specific place, situation, and time (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b): 13). In South Africa the very real differences among women need to be understood and accounted for (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995: 81). Race might seem to be an obvious divider of women, yet it is often the case that religion or party political affiliations serve to form

alliances. Self-awareness may be the key to unlocking a deeper sensitivity of diversity in all women. Once a White or Black or Coloured woman sees herself as multiplistic in identity associations, including socio-economic status, geographical region, religion and so forth, she can see other women with a new understanding of the complex influences on identity development (Tarver-Behring, 1994: 208).

5.3.3   The status of women in South Africa

Women make up 21 million of the population of South Africa (South Africa Yearbook, 1999: 1). There has been a tendency in South Africa to see women's struggles and experience as part of the struggle against apartheid and this has meant that the democratic movement tended to see the liberation of women as being secondary to national liberation (Kadali, 1995: 75; Karelse & Radloff, 1995: 66). The battle against apartheid often deflected attention away from gender oppression (Kadali, 1995: 75) and discrimination over many decades has had a disastrous effect on women's growth, development and empowerment:

- Women have been significantly economically disadvantaged. Widespread unavailability of many of the basic resources such as affordable energy, primary health care, access to clean water and other basic amenities impose a heavy burden on women (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995: 88)

- Violence against women is a major impediment to the development and empowerment of women (Cawood & Potter, 1996: 16). Violence is both a reflection of unequal power relationships in society while also serving to maintain this inequality

- Partly related to violence is the right of women to have control over their own bodies, implying a choice of women in that they have to be able to control not only their reproductive rights, but also the access of men to their bodies (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995: 88). Within many cultures in South Africa this basic principle is not acknowledged

- Girls are often disadvantaged in the area of access to education and training due to early pregnancy, household work and sexual abuse

- Women are disadvantaged by the social justice system. Even though sexism is outlawed by the constitution many instances of inequality and discrimination are still found (Cawood & Potter, 1996: 16)

- White women generally have access to higher status and better paid jobs, whereas Indian, Coloured and African women tend to be over-presented in lower status jobs (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995: 84)

Women's practical needs have to be met, but moves also have to be made towards transforming structures that discriminate against women and deny them their rights (Du Toit, 1997: 26). Saks (1997: 79) feels strongly that battles over national identities have a direct bearing on gender relations and roles. Before 1990 the hegemony of patriarchy, as mentioned previously, defined the political domain and issues related to women were either pushed from the political agenda for not being "political" enough, or had to stand back for the larger goal of the national liberation struggle. However, the transition to the "new" South Africa created the opportunity for women to politicise women's issues. An idea which is gaining momentum, and which has been reflected in governance in South Africa since 1994, is the increased participation of women in decision-making at all levels. Gender equality is firmly entrenched in the constitution of South Africa and a number of measures in the form of new Acts, amendments to Acts and national

programmes are being taken to address various issues relating to equality, discrimination, health, violence and crime.

5.2.4   Women, feminist research and participatory research

Participatory research as a methodology has as its central theme empowerment and the creation of knowledge. Participatory research as it emerged in the 1970's, however, centred exclusively on the perceptions, problems and experiences of male power. It was only in 1981 that Hall first raised the question "How can participatory research be human centred, not male-centred?" (Martin, 1994: 125). A feminist critique of participatory research being gender-blind developed in the mid-eighties and it was asked whether this potentially emancipatory research approach was intended for the male oppressed only (George, 1996: 119; Maguire, 1987: 50; Weiler, 1991: 451).

Feminism and the changing approaches concerning women have had a liberating effect on the creation of knowledge and of scientific knowledge in particular, with a major theoretical challenge to traditional Western knowledge systems emerging from feminist theory (Aebischer, 1988: 144; Gergen, 1988: ix; Weiler, 1991: 449). The feminist movement has also had an important influence on the debate and development of participatory research and has consequently enriched the theory and practice of participatory research (Tandon, 1996: 22).

In their search for new methods that go beyond traditional scientific methods, feminist research and participatory research share many emancipatory, transforming intentions:

- Participatory research challenges the concept of the world seen from a dominant, quantitative paradigm. Feminist research increasingly

denies that there is only one way of reality and one way of investigating it (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Maguire, 1987: 86; Klein, 1983: 97)

- Recognising the "bogus objective-subjective dichotomy" (Maguire, 1987: 87) feminists, like participatory researchers, are beginning to legitimise other ways of knowing by acknowledging women's real life experiences, however diverse, as valid (Maguire, 1987: 87; Mies, 1991: 66)

- Both participatory and feminist research challenge the necessity of a detached, distant relationship between researcher and researched. The emphasis is on change in the lives of people, implying involvement and effective intervention (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991: 99; Klein, 1983: 97; Maguire, 1987: 89)

- Participatory research as well as feminist research rejects the emphasis on the search for generalisations about the nature of human behaviour. When designing a study for research, methods are proposed to fit a particular group and results used to benefit those specifically involved in the research (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991: 100; Maguire, 1987: 92)

Participation on all levels, from research to politics, can be a real instrument of change where empowerment of women is an integral part of the process and the diversity of women's experiences are acknowledged (Reason, 1994(b): 13; Riano, 1994: 23).

5.4   Summary

Western culture has conditioned us to see the world in terms of incompatible differences. One of the major effects of a hegemonic value system, according to which minorities and women are invisible and valueless, as discussed in this chapter, is the sense of powerlessness that comes with self-negation and negation by others.

Competition for power, privilege and resources among all racial identities in the "new South Africa" are increasing (Simone, 1994: 162). The problem of the Coloured people being a numerical and political minority in South Africa, with the additional aggravation of being squeezed between other groups and the uncertainty of how they will be received by them (Van der Ross, 1984: 219), is still experienced today. There is a need within Coloured communities to affirm an identity and have the security of place in the post-apartheid non-racial dispensation in South Africa (Caliguire, 1996: 11).

In South Africa, women, and especially non-white women, have been significantly disadvantaged by the patriarchal, apartheid dispensation (Cawood & Potter, 1996: 14). This discrimination and subordination has resulted in a wasteland of human potential that has only now begun to be realised (Finnemore, 1995: 27).

The notions of empowerment and participation have become accepted across a whole range of professions and across political and social divisions in both theory and practice (Humphries & Truman, 1994: 185). For women to gain control over their lives, their participation in the planning and implementation of research programmes that will affect them directly, is a prerequisite (George, 1996: 119).

A participatory research project undertaken with Coloured women from Eersterust is described in the next chapter. Although the ultimate goal of this project is neither political nor feminist research *per se,* it can be seen as a meaningful attempt to address some gaps in information needs research concerning Coloureds and women in South Africa.

CHAPTER 6

The participatory research project

6.1 Introduction

Taking into consideration the background information presented in the previous chapters, and in the light of the literature studied, the indications are that the planned participatory project could successfully be executed.

This chapter comprises a discussion of the participatory process as conducted with the group of women belonging to the prayer group in Eersterust. The description of the practical implementation of the research project is followed by an assessment of the extent to which the project conformed to pre-requisites set for participatory research and an assessment of the information needs identified in the course of the project.

Conducting participatory research with the women presented both a challenge and an opportunity. Through the process of involvement and inquiry this project breaks away from the use of traditional research methods applied in information needs research, and calls for changes in the familiar role, attitude and behaviour of the researcher.

The women would not only be presented with the opportunity of identifying their unique information needs but, by actively participating in the project, they would be empowered to take decisions concerning their needs and circumstances in a way that would be of direct benefit to them.

6.2 Conducting the research project

6.2.1 Planning the project

Throughout the participatory research literature studied, authors stress the fact that no prescriptive methodology for participatory research should be followed. With the implementation of participatory research projects, however, the problem to be investigated and acted upon should ideally be identified and initiated by the community or an organisation representing a particular group of people.

Due to circumstances surrounding the research planning, the project was not specifically requested by any organisation or other interested parties:

- The researcher was in the first place attempting participatory research as a masters degree research project and not as a community or development project which meant that there was no developmental organisation or community with whom the project could be negotiated

- The choice of subject area and participants was furthermore a unilateral decision, as the researcher expressly wanted to work with women within the field of information needs research

As this was not an actual developmental project, it soon became clear that it would not be simple to categorise and follow the series of steps and activities of the research process strictly according to the phases as expounded in Chapter Three. Acting on an approach as suggested by Reason (1994(c): 201 and Schurink, 1998(b): 252), the researcher thus studied what others had done, explored the range of methods available and then created her own steps that were suitable for the project undertaken. The resultant phases in

implementing this project broadly corresponded to, but differed in detail from, the phases as previously identified.

The aim of the research was to investigate the application of participatory research techniques in this non-developmental subject area. It was therefore very important that, in spite of not being able to precisely follow the typical phases of the participatory process, attention be given to the strict adherence to the established pre-requisites and basic underlying principles as found in the participatory research literature.

6.2.2   Practical implementation of the research project

In accordance with generally accepted practice in qualitative research, much of the reporting on the course of and assessment of the practical project is written in the first person.

6.2.2.1   Phase one: Entering the community

Credibility is a factor of utmost importance when planning to enter a community and conduct a participatory research project. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, one of my colleagues at the university has been involved in various community projects in Eersterust over the years. As a result of her intimate knowledge of and regular interaction with the people, she is well known and trusted in the community. At her suggestion I accompanied her to a nursery school committee meeting one evening with the aim of asking the head of the school whether some of the mothers at the school could be approached to take part in my research project.

At the meeting I was introduced to the headmistress of the school and the committee members, and my request presented to them. After some discussion it was concluded that, due to many factors, trying to get mothers

of the nursery school to participate in the project would not be a practical idea. However, one of the committee members mentioned that she belonged to a group of women who came together regularly to pray and that she felt sure that they might be willing to be part of the project. This offer was gratefully accepted.

The woman named Nicolien Mansfield undertook to speak to the women in her prayer group at their next meeting the following Tuesday and would let me know what they decided.

The decision that I would not contact them, but that they would telephone me, was imperative for adherence to the basic underlying principle of participatory research – namely that the initiative should come from potential participants as far as possible.

6.2.2.2   Phase two: Initial meetings

After two weeks I received a call from Nicolien's husband to say that the women were interested in meeting me, and that I should come for an informal preliminary discussion the following morning. As I was not familiar with the area, he had undertaken to meet me and take me to the home where the women would be gathering. We arrived at the designated house after they had already finished with their regular prayers.

From the ensuing discussion with the group of women, it became obvious that the term information needs was strange to them, and various other ways of clarifying the concept had to be employed in order for them to understand it sufficiently. Most of the women in the group were, however, familiar with the concepts of research and of interviews. I therefore found it fairly easy to explain the participatory approach to them in terms of talking about our needs in a group instead of filling in forms (i.e. questionnaires) or the verbal

asking of questions (i.e. interviews). I emphasised that I would not prescribe any topics that would be covered and that the situation would be conducted on a participatory basis with each individual equally contributing to the discussions. Techniques for data collection and recording of information would also have to be devised by them. I also mentioned that "it would be nice" if some form of action could come out of the project, once again stressing that such an initiative or any other ideas would have to come from the group itself.

A lively discussion followed which also served as a general getting-to-know-each-other. The women eventually said they needed time to discuss their involvement in my project with their leader who was absent, but that they would in the meanwhile think about possible topics for discussion. They also suggested that if it was decided that they would participate, I should come to their prayer meetings every second Tuesday, to which I agreed.

Two weeks after the initial meeting, Nicolien telephoned to make the next appointment. By the time I reached the meeting-place, general consensus had been reached that the group would take part in the project and the women all seemed enthusiastic about participation. Additional members of the group, including their leader June, were at this second meeting. This meant that I once again had to explain the purpose of the research project and the major concepts/ideas behind what I envisaged for our working together.

The involvement of the women was already deliberately initiated by asking the women who were at the previous meeting whether my explanation corresponded to what I had said previously, and whether it was as they understood it.

6.2.2.3   Phase three: Subsequent meetings

Thereafter, from the middle of February 2000, I attended the prayer meetings on alternate Tuesdays. After arriving after their regular prayer time for some time, I was told to come earlier so that I could take part in the prayer session after which we would continue "working" – an encouraging indication that I was being accepted as a member of the group.

Initially the discussions were very general and unstructured, consisting of talking randomly about what they understood as the type of information they needed. Two women, the leader June, and Lizzie, seemed to have taken it upon themselves to keep the group "on track" whenever the discussion wandered from the subject. It was quite noticeable at this stage that when either of these two women was not there, the group tended to digress or forget about the research aims and chat about their own interests, everyday lives and other such general matters. I deliberately made sure not to interrupt or interfere in these discussions or in any other way influence them to keep to the task at hand.

I had furthermore made it very clear at the first two meetings that the members of the group themselves had to decide how data was to be collected and recorded. It soon became apparent that they had forgotten about this. Once again I withheld from trying to influence the course of events in any way, deciding not to raise the subject unless it became obvious that the project might be jeopardised without "formal" data to refer to.

It was only by the middle of March that the question of data collection was brought up unexpectedly by one of the members of the group. The women were very upset when they realised that they had not made notes and that a lot of information might have been "lost". It was suggested that we immediately sit down and try to "remember" what issues had been raised

during the previous meetings and that Lizzie would record them. This task of recalling previous topics of discussion took up a whole morning and it was then decided that Lizzie would serve as scribe for the rest of our time together.

At the following meeting Lizzie reported back on the consolidated list of information needs/topics of discussion that had been covered in the previous sessions. Some additions were made before agreement was reached that the information was correct.

The issue was now raised by the group that, instead of just talking in general, the discussions should become more structured. They decided that each member of the group would make a personal list of information needs and that these needs would be discussed individually each week. Over the next few months this was the way the meetings were organised and the data gathered.

The method of planning and listing topics for discussion meant that the needs were important to each individual person and would not easily be forgotten. This turned out to be the saving grace of the research project, as towards the middle of the year disaster struck. Lizzie, our scribe, got a job and was therefore unable to attend the meetings and take notes. In addition, she had lost the book in which the information had been recorded. We were initially devastated. However, it was once again decided to spend the next couple of meetings trying to recall all the information gathered in the previous months. The women suggested that this time around we should try and identify common themes that were covered, thus grouping the topics/information needs that arose during the discussions.

The only condition stipulated was that I wrote it all down as they spoke. This was generally agreed upon as being participatory as I was at this stage an integral part of the prayer group and not in any way an outsider or the leader.

These various unforeseen circumstances had as a direct, unplanned consequence the fact that the results and findings of our discussions were regularly reflected upon and evaluated. Analysis of the data became part of the process. It also meant that methods of data collection and the direction of the research had to be adapted to changing situations as the occasion arose.

6.2.2.4   Phase four: Withdrawing from the group

By November the project had reached the stage where I had to gradually prepare the group for my withdrawal from the prayer meetings. This turned out to be more of an emotional issue than we realised. I had become such an accepted member of the group that the women seemed to have assumed that I would stay on even after the research was completed. It took sensitivity and skill to explain that I had at the beginning of the project clearly stated that it was temporary, and secondly that I had a full-time job at the university and was only able to come to the sessions during the year with special permission.

We agreed that I would stop coming by the middle of December after their special end-of-year prayer meeting after which we would have a big tea party and exchange of gifts.

6.2.2.5   Phase five: Ongoing action

I had compiled a draft summary of the information needs identified, for the group's final evaluation and discussion. Apart from my writing an official

research report, we now had to decide what we were going to do with this information.

At one of the first meetings at the beginning of the year there was talk of the possibility of compiling a booklet with needed information identified during the research project. A booklet published by UNISA a couple of years ago had been brought to the meeting as an example of the type of thing they had in mind. The printing of a similar booklet, but aimed specifically at the women of the community, and containing additional information and tips as derived from our research was though to be a good idea.

However, at the end of our research period, although the women said they understood that listing ways in which information needs as identified can be solved could benefit the other women of the community, it was clear that they were not at all enthusiastic to start such a project at this stage. They promised to think about it "next year" and I left it at that.

6.3   Assessment of the research project

6.3.1   Assessing the accomplishment of participatory research goals

When studying the literature of participatory research one is struck by the wide variety of interpretations on how participatory research projects can be conducted under various circumstances and diverse situations. In spite of many complexities and often differences in approach, there are, as described in Chapter Three, basic underlying principles that should serve as guidelines when attempting this type of research.

The aim when analysing the process is therefore to see to what extent the implementation of the project conformed to the requirements and theoretical concepts that are referred to in the literature.

6.3.1.1   Assessing the pre-requisites set for participatory research

- **The assumption that adults are capable** – capable of learning, of changing and of acting. This assumption was implicit from the beginning of the project planning stage. The project was never intended to be a typical developmental project and I was therefore free from the danger of approaching the people with a preconceived paternalistic or "helping" attitude. The women in the group were involved as equal, capable partners from the beginning and many decisions were made and new ideas initiated by them throughout the course of the process

- **Knowledge creation and empowerment.** Information needs was a concept that the women in this study had not consciously encountered before. Their active involvement in the entire research process challenged and enabled them to reflect on ways to discover and create methods in which information needs could be identified and discussed. Without any professional input from me concerning methodology, data collection methods or other research approaches, they instinctively responded to the situation by collectively producing new ideas, insight and knowledge for the whole research process.

The women in the prayer group play a leading role in their community by way of helping and supporting individuals in need – spiritually and physically. In this way they are an empowered group. Empowerment through the creation of knowledge is, however, an important outcome of participatory research projects. Being able to articulate and systemise

their newly identified information needs, means that these women have been empowered to be able use this deepened and enriched knowledge within their community in a meaningful way

- ***Participatory research as an educational process.*** The unique nature of this project, combining participatory research with information needs research, provided a learning environment in which the women could identify needs that they had never consciously thought of or verbalised, and then to understand these needs and look at them in a critical manner. The women revealed a remarkable openness and eagerness to learn, and to hear about subjects and situations that they were unfamiliar with.

In return they shared many insights into their lives and their approach to problems that I could learn from and be enriched. The relationship between the women in the group and myself had very early in the project evolved into a mutual companionship that contributed to the ease with which sharing of ideas could take place.

Skills such as group membership skills for example, were not necessary to teach, as this group had existed for many years and their unique group dynamics were well established.

- One of the fundamental issues in participatory research is the ***departure from the traditional objective researcher-researched relationship.*** As in the words of Maguire (1987), I was not a detached researcher. The setting of this project in the homes of the women, being part of a prayer group, would under any circumstances be contra-indicative of objectivity. I realised very soon that it was impossible not to become involved in the group on a subjective level and identify with them and their problems. Even though we were

always aware of the fact that research was in progress, the lack of any formal data collection methods such as questionnaires probably also served as a contributing factor to the absence of traditional scientific neutrality.

- Participatory research is based on **a process of dialogue** - co-operative inquiry by both researcher and researched*.* The issue of who controls the direction the research is taking, is one that requires careful ongoing reflection throughout the research. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I made a point of not interfering in the course of events even though the discussions were sometimes not focused on the research topic. The absence of the need for a traditional hierarchical research situation was manifested when it appeared that my concerns were unfounded, as there was always someone in the group who steered the conversation back to its original track. One can rightly conclude that although work was sometime done intermittently, it was in fact a case of "accomplishing little of the task, but a lot of the process" (Whitmore, 1994: 86).

The establishment of an open rapport between the women and I encouraged the working together towards a common goal. A trusting relationship between us broke down any possible cultural barriers that might have existed and continuous discussion and dialogue resulted in generating awareness of and critical insight into their information needs

- *Participatory research is a problem-solving approach.* The building of relationships as discussed above, is part of the collective problem-solving process. Reciprocal initiative and control formed part of the whole process of this project. The women were directly involved in the selection of the topics for discussion, in the decision concerning methods of data collection and recording, as well as critically exploring

explanations for the needs that were identified in the course of the discussions. It was also conspicuous how often solutions to (sometimes unrelated) problems were found by means of these mutual discussions

- ***Participatory research is a process of ongoing action.*** This flexible methodology facilitates a flow from study to reflection to action generally resulting in transformation of, and direct benefits for, the people involved.

  At the conclusion of this project, there was no formal plan envisaged as to how the research results could be applied to benefit the group of women or the community of Eersterus. The possibility existed that the project could merely be seen as "a pleasant episode in the lives of the women…" (Mies, 1983: 137). Although the fact that the research did not link up to some form of ongoing action could be seen as a failing in the study, action was not identified as an aim of the study and the project was never intended to be an actual developmental project in which this failure would normally be regarded as a major shortcoming

6.3.1.2   Assessing other issues pertaining to participatory research

- ***Power relationships*** are one of the first issues that need to be explored in a participatory research project. As this project was not initiated by the women in the prayer group, it meant that I initially came in as the "expert" researcher. Even though I made it very clear from the beginning that this was to be an explicitly *participatory* research project conducted on an equal footing, a natural hesitancy was apparent at the first couple of meetings. The women in this prayer group are, however, a strong group with many natural leadership qualities. Once they realised that I meant what I had said about "power sharing" and decision-making on all levels, they accepted the situation very easily. I

was of course in the fortunate position that the actual results of the research were not my main concern, but the process itself. This meant that the possibility of tension between attainment of my goals for the project, and goals as envisaged and planned by the group of women in the course of the research did not arise

- *Ethical considerations* need to be critically examined in a project of this kind. Some aspects that had to be taken into consideration were the following:

  - *Confidentiality.* This never arose as a problem. When I asked for personal information (life histories) from the individuals in the group as well as the history of the origin of the prayer group, I stressed that they could choose whether to give me the information or not, and secondly that it would be kept strictly confidential. However, they made it very clear that this was not at all necessary as they were proud of Eersterust and their work, and that they wanted to be mentioned by name in my report on the project.

    Confidentiality within the group itself was of course no problem as this sharing of problems and confidences was the strength of the group and contributed to their cohesiveness

  - Closely related to the above is the possibility of *putting people at risk,* as social repercussions could arise from publishing results of research done in community development. This was never an area of concern in this research project, as the participants were well aware of how the results were to be published, and, as mentioned above, were keen to be part of the publication process

- *Expectations.* In a developmental participatory research project the danger is there that the researcher could raise expectations in the community that he/she might not be in a position to fulfil. Even though this project was not planned as a developmental one *per se*, it is interesting to note that one of the first things Nicolien said to me when I spoke to them at the first meeting was "What do we get if we help you with your research?" I made it clear that no physical or other measurable advantages (such as money) would come from the project, but that I thought we could all be enriched from the contact and relationships that might develop. This they seemed to find intriguing and acceptable

- ▪ ***Suitability of research methods.***

  - Working with the *group* in an *informal* manner was ideally suited for this project. The prayer group was already an established entity and the idea of sharing and talking about problems a natural part of their group culture – group discussions were therefore neither strange nor threatening

  - All the women in the group are literate and the *written collection, analysis and summaries of findings* therefore also posed no problem. A copy of the final report will be given to them in a summarised format

  - *Flexibility* of work plans and activities was a major characteristic of this project as the structure and "agendas" of meetings were controlled by the women in the group as was seen in their deciding when and where we would meet, and what the subject of discussion would be. Their reluctance to take any further action after completion of the project also serves as an indication of their

autonomy not only in decision-making context, but also in changing original plans to suit themselves

- ***Role of the facilitator/researcher.*** With the wide range of possible approaches to participatory research, professional competencies and skills are required from the researcher to fit the particular situation in which he/she finds him/herself.

A possible danger reported in participatory research literature is the inadvertent enhancing of dependency by the researcher, very often in response to initial apathy from the community in which developmental research is being done. With this project it was very interesting to see how I came to play a dual role in the prayer group. On the one hand I was "looked up to" as a university lecturer and researcher, but when it came to religious matters, there was no doubt in their minds as to where they themselves stood. They were secure in their faith and naturally assumed that, as I was a believer and therefore "one of them", we could all learn from each other. This attitude of self-assurance was soon carried over to the information needs discussions as the women claimed ownership of the project and dependency on me for leadership and guidance became a non-issue.

- ***Time.*** In most of the literature studied, time is identified as a major factor in participatory research – time for developing rapport and trust, time required from the people with whom research is being done, as well as time spent by the researcher, as these are usually medium to long-term projects.

This project was conducted over a period of about 9 to 10 months. We were fortunate in that Tuesdays were already set apart by the prayer group as their special day with no other activities planned. This meant

that my research did not demand any extra time from their personal lives. Extra time was, however, sometimes involved when they had to prepare topics for discussion at home and when they were asked to write up their personal histories.

The meetings normally lasted from 10:00 to 14:00, which constituted a large part of my day. Time commitment from me as researcher turned out to be considerable as visits to the prayer group had to be fitted in between teaching and other regular work schedules.

6.3.2   Assessing information needs results

The aim of this study was to determine whether participatory research could be applied to the field of information science for the identification of information needs. It is therefore necessary to see what needs were identified in the course of the project and to compare them with needs identified in some previous studies.

6.3.2.2   Categorisation of needs identified in this study

The information needs areas that were identified in the informal discussions with the women of the prayer group were grouped as follows:

▪ *Education of children.* This was a subject that was raised regularly by all the women in the group and many sessions were spent, after documenting this as an area of concern, in discussing ways of getting the information and/or solving the problems surrounding the issue.

Information is needed on what to do with children who leave school early: where they can go for further training, where they can find jobs. The same questions as above are asked concerning children who are expelled from

school, as well as how to find out what the rights of such children are who want to continue their education, but have no school to go to. Information is needed on places to go for help with children with learning problems: where to get them properly tested and where to find the necessary trained therapists.

- ▪ ***Others issues relating to children.*** Much time was spent on child-related issues, some of which may not fall strictly into an information-needs category. It can, however, be argued that if the parents had the necessary access to literature concerning the issues, to professional support groups, or to any such channels of communication and information, they would be able to handle the problems more efficiently.

  The questions asked were: *what do I do with/what do I say to* children who want to get married too young; children who sit at home and refuse to go to school; girls who become pregnant at a very young age; young married husbands (of daughters) who do not want to take the responsibility of raising their own children; children who become depressed and feel unloved in the home; my own child hurting other children at school; teenagers misusing drugs and alcohol.

- ▪ ***Relationships.*** Many of the issues concerning children could be categorised under this heading, but the women felt that relationships between husband and wife should be discussed separately.

  Information is needed on: how to communicate with your husband if he refuses to speak about issues within the marriage; where to go for help if men were no longer interested in sex; what to do in the case of complications arising from diabetes such as impotence of husbands.

- **Employment.** The lack of jobs is a major problem amongst this group of women – jobs for children, for themselves, and for their husbands.

  They need information on how and where to find jobs; how to write a proper CV; where to find people to give you references.

- **Health matters.** The women are, with the exception of one who belongs to a medical aid, all dependent on public hospitals and clinics for getting basic health care. Complications that may arise from illnesses, counselling teenagers on contraceptives, and the dangers of drug abuse are all areas where information is badly needed.

- **Welfare.** Some of the women in the group were at times dependent on social welfare for money and food distribution. They felt that they did not know where to get information on how much help they were entitled to.

  They also needed more information on issues such as care for foster children, the money involved, and the rights of both the children and their foster parents.

- **Housing.** Many of the families do not own their own homes, but they felt that information concerning the rental of cheap housing in good areas was not easy to find.

- **Legal issues.** Due to a lack of money and thus access to proper legal counsel, information is needed on: how to draft a will; who to get as witness; where to get an attorney if you have no money; how to go about divorcing your husband; whom to contact if child maintenance payments are in arrears; what to do if someone breaks a contract with you.

- **Finance.** The women were very keen to get information on how to start your own business, how and where to invest your money, and how the stock market operated.

- **Politics.** The women were generally politically well-informed, but said that they needed to know where to find out whether they were still on the voting list and also when the next general election would take place.

- **The elderly.** An issue that was raised consistently was the plight of the elderly in Eersterust. The women all felt that they did not know where to go to for help and advice when old people were abused. They felt very strongly that the social workers were not interested, that their church ministers did not know what to do, and that they themselves had no information as to how to handle such situations.

- **Consumer information.** Information on a wide variety of subjects such as where to buy cheap cars, where to rent formal clothing for weddings, where to buy good fabrics for making clothes, where to buy certain foodstuffs, and so forth, is needed on a continuous basis.

- **Other issues.** Some issues raised during the meetings were not documented by the women as information needs, but were mentioned as problems encountered in their daily lives. These discussions touched on: crime and safety, race relations in the "new" South Africa - they feel very threatened by the newly evolved status of Blacks in South Africa - transport problems, and problems with neighbours.

6.3.2.1 Comparison with information needs identified in other studies

It is first of all interesting to note how many of the needs identified in this study correspond with those identified in other surveys, affirming the

universality of identifiable information needs of members of society. Just a few significant South African studies are selected for mention. Results of studies in specific groups such as teachers, Oosthuizen (1997), informal black settlements, Mogane (1998), and rural areas, Kaniki (1995) and Maepa (2000), were not regarded as relevant to include for comparison with results obtained in this study with urban Coloured women.

- Boon (1992(b)) in his study listed information needs according to development areas. Corresponding domains are found in his areas of economic development, political development, educational and intellectual development, social development, and human development

- Manaka's (1986) classification of the needs of blacks in South Africa as personal needs, societal needs, educational needs, and needs for decision-making compare well with needs areas identified in this study

- Tsebe (1985) found cardinal information needs as being educational, health, legal, and socio-economic, whilst Van Zijl (1987) concentrated on non-physical information needs, identifying educational, economic, cultural, social, and national needs. All these categories are represented in this study

- The study of Fairer-Wessels (1989) on black women in a disadvantaged community was the only study found to concentrate on the needs of women specifically. She found information was needed in matters relating to health, employment and jobs, clothing and shelter, childcare and family, and consumer, buying and financial matters. It is very significant to note how closely these areas resemble those identified in this study with Coloured women

It is also of interest to see which areas of information needs recorded in the above studies were not identified by the women during the course of this project:

- Religious and spiritual information as specified by Boon and Van Zijl, proved not to be a problem area for the women. This can be regarded as natural within their circumstances, being part of a prayer group. Furthermore, both June and Lizzie are trained lay preachers, able to answer any queries arising in the group. As very regular churchgoers, further spiritual information is obtained from their ministers and other church affiliated groups

- Recreational and cultural information needs (Boon and Van Zijl) were areas of needs not specifically identified by the women. One can only speculate that their family and economic circumstances leave little scope or even need for recreation. Much of their time is spent on seeing to the everyday needs of husbands, children, grandchildren and elderly parents all living in the same home. Cultural activities are concentrated around the church

- Educational needs (Boon, Manaka, Tsebe, Van Zijl) concerning their children were identified by the women, but not one of them mentioned a need for any information on further education for themselves or improving their own capabilities. Three of the women were involved in a community project for a year in which they were trained in needlework skills for the making of curtains and other goods to sell. Some of the women had also completed Bible study courses some years ago. It would seem as if this fulfilled the needs of these women. Although all the women are literate, none of them expressed any need for educational reading material apart from the Bible.

- Other social needs that came up during general discussions, but were not recorded by the women as information needs, concerned crime and safety (Boon, Manaka, Tsebe, Van Zijl, Fairer-Wessels). The group was generally interested to know from the researcher whether she, as a white person, was afraid of coming into the Coloured area as crime was a problem in Eersterust, but they never mentioned it as an area of direct concern for themselves.

- Information concerning scientific and technological matters (Boon) was not touched upon at all and could possibly be regarded as not being within their sphere of interest or experience.

6.4   Summary

A participatory research project, complying with the requirements set for participatory research as found in the literature, was successfully conducted with a group of women from the Coloured community of Eersterust. The practical implementation of the participatory research process resulted in a comprehensive list of identified information needs. The further use of the methodology in this field of research, and in other non-developmental fields, will be looked at in the next chapter.

Although one has to be cautious in generalising from the results obtained, it can be concluded that the information needs that were identified by the women are of considerable significance in terms of comparison to other studies done on information needs. It is foreseen that the results could serve as basis for further programmes and services in the community, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Summary and conclusions

7.1   Introduction

The broad aim of this research project was to examine the feasibility of applying participatory research methods for the identification of information needs. The use of this methodology was considered an attractive as well as practical alternative to traditional methods and techniques used in information needs research. Both in the social sciences in general and in the information needs area specifically, it is felt that the detached quantitative approaches to research tend to create distortions and misconceptions about the nature and the needs of the people that are the subjects of research. Participatory research as a person-centred methodology focusing on the active involvement of people in the whole research project, is the absolute antithesis to these objective approaches.

The decision to conduct a participatory research project with Coloured women proved to be both fortuitous and far-sighted. An in-depth literature study showed that not only was there no research done specifically on the information needs of Coloureds in South Africa, but also pointed out an enormous gap in studies of information needs of previously disadvantaged women in South Africa.

7.2   Evaluating the results and contributions of the research project

The following aims and issues have to be taken into consideration when the results of the research project are evaluated:

- The first aim of the study was to investigate the viability of the application of the participatory research methodology in a non-developmental context

- The second aim of the study was to find out whether the application of the participatory research methods would yield the expected results namely the identification of the information needs of the subjects that participated in the project

- With regard to the above two aims of this study, an investigation of the validity of research results, as applicable to the specific scope and type of research, is a necessary area of concern in this project

7.2.1   The application of participatory research methods

The issues to be appraised concerning the participatory research methodology focus on the extent to which, within the defined intentions of the project, practical research meets theory as expounded in the literature.

When looking at the research design and the practical implementation of the participatory process as it was described and assessed in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the objectives of the study were achieved:

- Within the demarcated limitations, the basic pre-requisites for a participatory research project were met

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- Other related issues to be taken into consideration in the participatory research process were also addressed with positive conclusions

One of the main objectives of participatory research in general, is the production of knowledge. The generation of knowledge and subsequent application thereof was presumed as a natural outcome of this research project.

Whilst never losing sight of the basic pre-requisites for participatory research, the process was to a great degree one of discovery. New insight was obtained concerning the need for information in all areas of the lives of the women and many creative ways of solving the needs were generated during the research process. Building on the existing strength and composition of the group the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and the sharing of new ideas and information between the researcher and the participants became part of an enriching learning experience.

7.2.2 Identifying information needs through the use of participatory research techniques

As was mentioned in previous chapters, the majority of information needs studies, including those in South Africa, have, with some exceptions, been conducted by means of quantitative research techniques.

In this project participatory research, as a qualitative methodology, not only created the means for conducting research aimed at understanding the individuals in their unique circumstances, involving them in all areas pertaining to the project, but proved to be a method that achieved the desired results.

A wide range of information needs was identified and the resultant comparison with similar studies showed interesting overlap and omissions pertaining to the social, religious and other situations of the women involved.

The information needs identified and described in Chapter Six can be seen as a meaningful contribution of this study. The results obtained not only attest to the viability of the use of participatory research methods in the field of information needs research, but based on the needs identified, the possibility exists for the creation of information services within the community.

7.2.3   Addressing the question of validity of the research results

As was explained in Chapter Three, positivist criteria of validity are regarded as inappropriate for the type of knowledge produced by a qualitative method such as participatory research. In participatory research the researcher does not set out to test a pre-conceived hypothesis, but the validity and reliability of research results revolve around what happens during the process of research. Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to data and conclusions reached by using the method in a particular context for a particular purpose.

Servaes (1999: 117) is of the opinion that whether participatory research fails or succeeds, i.e. whether research yields results or not, is secondary to the interaction and communication process of participating groups. Other writers (De Koning & Martin, 1996(b); Maguire, 1987; Martin, 1994; Maxwell, 1992; Servaes, 1999; Small, 1988; White, 1994) corroborate this evaluation of success in terms of meaningful processes. References are made to:

- The focus being on the process

- Size of the study in terms of population not being an issue

- The fact that an important question to address is who is controlling the direction the research takes, as this would be an important indication of validity

- The assumption that having participated in the research, groups would subsequently own the knowledge created thus confirming the validity/usability of results

- The continuous assessment of findings as an indication of reliability of research findings

In this study, within the delimited context, the above-mentioned pertinent issues relating to validity of research results were addressed:

- The focus of the study was always on the methodology and process of participation. The results, i.e. needs identified, were regarded as secondary to the emphasis placed on adherence to the principles of participatory research

- The number of women taking part in the project was never an issue. They were regarded as unique individuals within their specific circumstances and not as a representative sample of the community

- The direction of the research was controlled by the women. Although the study was not initiated by the women, decisions relating to all areas of research were made by them. This included times of meetings, format of the discussions, topics to be discussed, and methods of collecting data

- Ongoing reflection and analysis were distinctive features of the project. Continuous checking with all participants during the process ensured that the information was correctly reflecting the meanings that they wanted to convey

- The eventual use to be made of the information generated by the project was also fully in the hands of the participants. They owned the knowledge that was created and made their own decision as to the application of the results obtained – in his case not to follow up the project with any immediate action

7.3   Conclusions and recommendations

"Reflecting on the past draws attention to the future" (Reason, 1994(c): 189). At the conclusion of this study, some meaningful areas of interest came to the fore that could serve as inspiration for the future use of participatory research methodologies.

7.3.1   Future implementation of participatory research methods within other contexts in South Africa

As was seen from various reports documented in Chapter Three, the concept of participatory research is not unknown in South Africa. With the exception of an article by Van Rooyen & Gray (1995) investigating the compatibility of participatory research to social work, all the studies reflect the use of the methodology in areas of development. Participatory research can, however, be used in a variety of contexts and disciplines outside of development.

Research is not abstracted from the society in which it operates (Servaes, 1999: 101). South Africa is (still) in the process of undergoing social change

and the need for reciprocal understanding of all components of our society is very real. Participatory research is an approach that does not violate the dignity of people by controlling or dominating them in any way. Participatory work facilitates communication and understanding across cultural divides and can be translated from the developmental context into many other contexts. Researchers in South Africa should address this challenge. The experience and consequences of the increasing use of participatory research methods in a variety of research fields could have a meaningful impact on the lives of people in South Africa.

7.3.2   Participatory research as a methodology for future information needs studies

Although qualitative research methods are still rarely used in South African information needs studies some mention has been made in the literature of the significance of the idea of participation. Bekker & Lategan (1988: 69), in their study on information services in black communities stress the importance of ground level community participation in determining needs for the establishment of such services. Fairer-Wessels (1990: 366) is of the opinion that community information services cannot be imposed from the top down, but that people of the community have to be consulted at length for results to be relevant.

Participation and participatory research are not strategies just to make people feel involved, but aim to discover the importance of personal experiences and the creation of knowledge through concern with people's lives and needs. Identification of and insight into the information needs of the women in this study was gained through their active involvement in the research project. Obtaining reliable and relevant results from such an approach confirms the practical applicability of participatory techniques in this field of study. This could serve as an example for the increasing use of

qualitative participatory research methods as viable alternatives to quantitative techniques in information needs research.

7.3.3   Further participatory research with women

In the last decade the debate between quantitative and qualitative research approaches was, as in participatory research, also apparent in the feminist research arena. It is generally felt that qualitative research is more useful to research with women as quantitative approaches distort women's experiences by translating them into categories pre-determined by researchers (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991: 85; Mies, 1991: 67).

Feminist research is committed to changing inequalities experienced by women in society, making their experiences less distorted and more visible in research. Participatory research methodology offers an alternative view of society in that it is *inter alia* concerned with creating more just and equitable systems.

Kadali (1995: 77) calls on academics to play a more prominent role in feminist research, as she regards academic feminism not only a socio-political tool for change but also an intellectual activity for the construction of new knowledge. Doing participatory research in a variety of contexts and disciplines with the women of South Africa can offer a further contribution to the "redistribution and consolidation of power" (Maguire, 1987: 8) among and between women and men.

7.3.4   Areas for the development of further programmes in the Eersterust community

Within the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria a diversity of programmes are offered creating the potential for co-operative efforts of research and developmental programmes.

The following are some suggestions as to how the results of this study could be practically applied for further research programmes using students and researchers from the Programmes in Information Science and Library Science, Development Communication, and Publishing:

- The women of the prayer group are all involved in various groups in their individual church denominations, are well known in the community and therefore have extended contacts and networks. It would be of value if these women could become part of a larger project for the identification and assessment of the information needs of the women of the broader Eersterust community. Later projects for the identification of information needs of other groups in the community, such as young people, the elderly, and so forth, could be natural follow-up activities

- The information needs identified as a result of this study and from other projects as mentioned above, could serve as basis for a comprehensive programme of information provision in the community. Such a project would of course not necessarily be the responsibility of the researchers only, but could be a co-operative effort linking numerous individuals and organisations involved in existing service areas, libraries, community information services, telecentres, and many more

- The publication of a booklet as initially proposed by the women in this study, would contribute much to information provision in the community.

Such an assignment would necessitate the investigation of information-seeking patterns of the members of the community, the identification of their sources of information as well as identifying new or alternative sources of information for publication

Participatory research is an integrated process. Involving the members of the community of Eersterust in projects as suggested, would motivate and empower them to become more aware of the needs of the people and to devise ways and means of finding solutions to the problems identified. The use of participatory research techniques and collective investigation in these interdisciplinary projects would serve as an educational process for the development of skills and knowledge of all the participants – the members of the community of Eersterust as well as the researchers involved in the projects.

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