

Abstract

Title Self-Organization among Poor People
A Study the Poor House: Initiative, Mobilization and Outcome

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The overall objective of this study is to examine conditions for self-organization processes among poor people and claimants. The Poor House, an action group, an organization and a centre for poor people and claimants was established in Oslo in 1994. The study is conducted as an action research project in cooperation with the Poor House. The study focuses on three dimensions of self-organization: The formation process, mobilization and outcome. In following the origin process I have had the possibility to describe the way the Poor House was established. The first research question is therefore: Which factors were important in the emerging process. The challenge of recruiting and of keeping up continuing commitment among the activists lead up to the next set of research questions: How did the Poor House manage to mobilize members and participants, what has promoted and what has hampered mobilization of members and active participants? Which challenges and problems have they faced in attempting to mobilize poor people and claimant groups in Oslo?

Did they succeed in their objectives? The Poor House have had easy access to media to get their voice heard. Poverty had not been recognized as a social problem in Norway in public discourse until the middle of the 1990es. From 1996, two years after the Poor House started, there has been increasing public debate about poverty in the affluent Norwegian society, and poverty was set on the political agenda from the election campaign in 1997. The public and political recognition of poverty as a social problem cannot be seen as the result of campaigning from the Poor House and other organizations, but there are reasons to believe that they have their stake in this development. The Poor House has to a certain degree obtained public recognition, but so far they have not seen collective advantages in ways of better living conditions for their constituency, but twelve years may be a short period to expect changes. Two topics are addressed in the final part: 1. The dilemmas of inclusion, cooperation or co-optation when relating to an opponent that is also the source for financial support. 2. The difficulties that arise from fighting for respect and citizenship for the public identity of poor people, and at the same time fighting to abolish poverty.